

# THE CORNHILL





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# THE CORNHILL



No. 1026

Winter 1960/61

## MAGAZINE

	PAGE
BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES .. .. .	vii
THE ART OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY <i>by Richard Church</i>	469
I NEED A FRIEND (A Story) <i>by Elizabeth Berridge</i>	481
MY DRAGON .. .. . <i>by Vernon Bartlett</i>	491
THE KING DICTATES (Illustrated) <i>by A. N. G. Richards</i>	494
SULLIVAN (A Story) .. .. . <i>by Etienne Amyot</i>	506
A WISH (A Poem) .. .. . <i>by Peter Green</i>	527
THE HAYLOFT (A Story) .. .. . <i>by Richard Lucas</i>	528
THE AUTUMN IN NORFOLK SHIPYARD (A Poem) <i>by X. J. Kennedy</i>	537
THE CHILD IN THE WATER (A Story) <i>by Beryl Seaton</i>	538
INDEX .. .. .	545

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JOHN MURRAY, 50 ALBEMARLE STREET, LONDON, W.1

At present *THE CORNHILL* appears quarterly and will publish occasional Supplements containing work of up to 35,000 words in length.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

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RICHARD CHURCH, poet, novelist, critic, literary adviser, was a civil servant for many years, and his trilogy of novels, *The Porch*, *The Stronghold*, *The Room Within* (Dent), which won the Femina Vie Heureuse Prize, gives a portrait of Civil Service life. Excerpts from his autobiographies *Under the Bridge* and *The Golden Sovereign* (Heinemann) appeared in *The Cornhill*.

ELIZABETH BERRIDGE: novelist, short-story writer, critic and editor. She has written both sound and television programmes. Among her novels are *The House of Defence* (Falcon Press), *Upon Several Occasions* (Heinemann). *I Need a Friend* is an episode which will appear in her forthcoming novel *The Seventh Cup* (Heinemann).

VERNON BARTLETT, journalist and broadcaster and specialist in foreign affairs, M.P. from 1938 to 1950, now lives in Singapore. Amongst his recent books are *Struggle for Africa* (Muller), *Report from Malaya* (Deutsch).

A. N. G. RICHARDS is an assistant master and Librarian at St. Paul's School. He has known the Pepys Library since he was an undergraduate at Magdalene College, Cambridge. The manuscript volume *Royal Escape* was entrusted to him by Pepys' old college to be exhibited in Pepys' old school when H.M. Queen Elizabeth II visited it in May 1959.

ETIENNE AMYOT, writer, musician, lecturer, broadcaster, has made extensive tours in Europe and America as a concert pianist. He was the first to undertake the planning of the B.B.C. Third Programme after the War. Earlier stories of his have appeared in *The Cornhill*.

PETER GREEN: writer and critic. Amongst his published books are historical novels *Achilles his Armour* and *The Sword of Pleasure*, which won the Heinemann Award; a biography of Kenneth Grahame; and his recent *Essays in Antiquity* (John Murray).

RICHARD LUCAS (writing under a pseudonym) comes of a writing family and is the son of a distinguished author. He has worked for a magazine and for a literary agency. He is now working on a novel.

X. J. KENNEDY is a young American poet, teaching at the University of Michigan. *The Autumn in Norfolk Shipyard* is his first poem to appear in England, but his work has been in the *New Yorker*, *Poetry* and *Paris Review*.

BERYL SEATON: contributor to *Punch*, *The Spectator*, *Harper's Bazaar* and other periodicals. She has recently completed a book on the response of women to their changing environment.

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# Noel Blakiston

**THE LECTURE AND OTHER STORIES** is a new collection of short stories by a frequent contributor to *Cornhill Magazine*: Mr. Blakiston's characters include young and old, male and female, lay and clerical, and range from an art-historian to a donkey.

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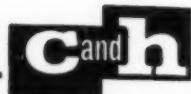
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JOHN MURRAY

# *The Art of Autobiography*

BY RICHARD CHURCH

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THE reading of autobiographies has been popular since the days of Benevenuto Cellini. It may even have been an attractive form of literature when Caesar wrote his Commentaries. Since the end of the war this popularity has suddenly become inflated and this may be a symptom of the fear, common to all humanity today, that the increasing State control is likely to crush the individual. One way to assure oneself of one's own integrity, and I might say sanctity, as against the constant intrusion of the Public Authority into one's private life, is to put it down in writing. In relating the story of one's days the individual gives a shape to his own identity. It is in a way presenting an exhaustive identity card to society as a means of assurance that you and I, and whoever else undertakes the job of recording his personal adventures, really and truly exist and can be differentiated from the other numbers in the various Government departments where we are all registered.

That is my interpretation of why people have suddenly begun to write autobiographies in such profusion today. Maybe other people read them for the same reason. They want to be assured that there is such a thing as an individual claim to the specific adventure of living with all its vagary, its oddity and its sheer cussedness. This is a form of protest against being dragooned by bureaucracy. How long this can continue in a world where populations are ever on the increase I dare not contemplate. The more of us there are in the world, the less room there is for the individual to move about, and if you cannot move about you are driven to interior adventures within the compass of your imagination. That restriction can only lead to neurosis and illusions, forms of self-aggrandisement that have no reality, and what is worse, no contact with other human beings. Thus the paradox arises that the more people there are in the world, the more

### *The Art of Autobiography*

lonely we become : circumstances liable to drive us finally to madness, and probably racial suicide. That may be why we are so busy experimenting with hydrogen bombs. The impulse may be an unconscious desire to escape an even more terrifying form of destruction, the destruction by sheer inanition.

But all this is rather abstract generalisation and the historian might destroy such theories by pointing in more detail to conditions of life in the past. In ancient Egypt the scope for individual self-expression would hardly be called promising. In all primitive communities the individual counts for little. He is the victim of tribal custom and taboo, and any personal idiosyncrasy is rapidly suppressed. It might be safe to say that only high degrees of civilisation, or maybe civilisations in their decadent periods, permit the individual to express himself with some determination, both in action and in personal record.

So much for the circumstances which lead people to write the stories of their lives. Nobody wants to be forgotten, unless he is in a state of desperate recoil from a meaningless existence, or degrading circumstances. So we will assume that autobiography is a natural function. It is usually expressed by keeping diaries, and the most elementary form of the autobiography remains as day-to-day recording of one's small adventures. Occasionally those adventures leap into a crisis and take dramatic form. If the diarist has any artistry, his representation of those moments of crisis takes on a dignity reflected from these superior circumstances.

Even diaries written mechanically and privately without any consciousness of an audience can be gilded by the processes of time, each tiny event being given an adventitious value as a survivor from things, people and events long forgotten. Instance after instance can be given of this accretion to some pedestrian record which lifts it up to the status of literature ; probably historical literature rather than imaginative, but nevertheless of a value which it had not possessed when it was written, and beyond the range of its author's aspiration. A notable example is the diaries of the old Parson Woodforde, which record his life in the west of England and East Anglia in the eighteenth century. He was a worthy fellow, but his main interest in life was his dinner table. The amount of space given to descriptions of gargantuan meals in his various vicarages would have been revolting to a

contemporary. To us who read about them two hundred years later they are a revelation of a way of life which carries almost as much charm as the divine artistry of Jane Austen.

I doubt even if the most world famous diary of all, that of the civil servant Samuel Pepys, would fascinate us were it being written today by him along the same lines and following the same occupations which kept him busy in the time of Charles II. One can recall diaries kept by individuals who have since become immortalised by the quality of their careers in the world and the romantic aura which has gathered about their fame under the caressive artistry of time.

It is always apparent that this technique of diary keeping is dogged by chronology, one of the great stumbling blocks in the art of autobiography.

Time itself tries to repair its own mischief by making even the dulllest day-to-day record into a period piece by draping it with the garments of the centuries. This form of autobiography, the diary, the day-to-day chronicle, is the most obvious. In the hands of a person possessed by a lively and penetrating curiosity about things and people, and also about his or her own reactions to things and people, that gossip becomes universal and time is capable of immortalising it. But generally speaking, the chronological procedure constricts the writer and we know how often in picking up the memoirs of a distinguished public figure we are confronted with the dreary repetition of phrase, how he would visit his grandmother, he would wander out into the garden, he would observe such and such. This use of the conditional tense without any substantial conditions to demand it is a technical weakness which quickly exhausts the reader's patience, though he may not understand why. It destroys all dramatic surprise and makes suspense (the great leavener of all storytelling) so monotonously certain that it no longer suspends anything except the certainty of boredom in the reader.

This is all very well if the personality of the diarist is sufficiently strong to overcome the drawback, but even so the reader feels disappointed at the lack of excitement in meeting famous people, and sharing in historical events, but in such a humdrum way.

Most of these writers of memoirs have little literary experience, nor

### The Art of Autobiography

are they artists. They just do not know how to handle the raw material of the writer, which is life itself, and they are clumsy fingered in practising upon the keyboard of language. When, however, the word-artist, the Lavengro or word-master, indulges in autobiography, his reason for doing so is usually two-fold. First, he has probably reached a period of life, after many decades of professional activity, when he begins to run out of material, except for the reflective visions of nostalgia, sunset-clear in the evening of life. The springs of invention are failing him. But he must keep in practice, for the art of writing is like that of playing a musical instrument, it has to be practised every day, and preferably for several hours every day. That is one reason why the keeping of a diary is useful towards perfecting the art of self-expression. Just as painters use themselves as models for portraits, so the writer has at hand a constant subject upon which to practise. And in drawing portraits of himself he does not have to pay a model. This reason for writing an autobiography is, of course, a purely professional one which will not interest the general public, but in result it is likely to produce something very worthwhile. A perfect example of it is Wordsworth's *Prelude*, a poem which stands at the head of that master's work and is, in my belief, one of the greatest autobiographies written in any language.

The second reason for the professional writer to indulge in autobiography is because of the challenge to attack, frontally, his lifelong enemy. This enemy is time, the time spirit, which lies in wait for every story-teller. No one fully masters it. We know how the first great European epic, the *Iliad* of Homer, is not in fact a successful epic at all because it has not mastered the whole process of time unrolling in its effort to tell the story of the Greek expedition against Troy. The time occupied by that expedition was ten years, but the *Iliad* only deals with the last nine months of it. Further, it is confused in its narration and a hero killed in one of the early books is laying about him valiantly in one of the later books.

Even when the author has gone almost mathematically to work in his attempt to control this demon of time, the result is never wholly satisfactory. I think of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in which the progress of Dante and Virgil, and later Dante and Beatrice, is laid out with absolute geometrical precision, yet the very success with which he



commands chronology gives an element of artificial restriction to the truth of this adventure of a living soul in its journey through the three phases of consciousness which we all have to endure—hell, purgatory and paradise. But, nevertheless, the *Divine Comedy* survives as a triumphant work, and the reason for this is that this master poet's genius for selecting significant incidents was so authoritative that it has imposed a pattern of literary architecture upon all epic writing, and indeed upon all story-telling ever since. Tasso, Ariosto, Camoens and Milton are directly inspired from an architectural point of view by the structure of the *Divine Comedy*, so far as it masters this universal stumbling block, the time factor.

Now this time factor is one which comes immediately to the surface in the art of autobiography. The art is indeed an effort to flatter this enemy of ours. The autobiographer seeks out time and tries to harness it to the incidents and the values of his own life. But we have seen that in trying to record minute by minute and hour by hour events from the cradle to the grave, he has defeated his own purpose. He has tried to number the innumerable. But since it is impossible to record everything in one's life, moment by moment, what is the professional writer to do to find a substitute for that painful and laborious realism which is doomed to failure? The answer is one which applies to all the arts, but more significantly to this art of autobiography. It is the process of selection.

But that brings up a further problem; what sort of selection? And the answer to that is a long one. It involves the whole background, training, range of consciousness, character and intelligence of the author. It can also be said to involve the nature of his audience. If he is writing for the sophisticated reader he can assume that his nod will be as good as a wink. He can be allusive and he can take short cuts. His metaphors can be bold and his similes esoteric. But if he is writing for the less initiated, he will need to be godlike and will have to temper the wind of his revelations.

But does the act of tempering involve also temporising, a process liable to make an author dishonest? If the author compromises with facts does that affect the immeasurable possibilities of this elusive art of autobiography? Here the problem involves the conscience and the character of the writer. Many critics have said that the perfect

### The Art of Autobiography

autobiography can be written only by a cad, such as Benevenuto Cellini, Casanova or Rousseau. Or if not a cad, one of those shameless characters who are willing to kiss and tell. Maybe like George Moore, they are willing to tell without even having kissed. But if they are artists with the gift of selection, they will make a readable narrative, and not only readable but a significant narrative, one that adds up to something coherent, a philosophy of life. It may be so whittled down in the selection process that it becomes hardly more than a skeleton, as in the *Pensées* of Pascal, but we know how authoritative is that little book as a microcosm of the whole structure of human life.

In this matter of selecting his material the experienced writer will instinctively work towards an accumulative effect, just as the musician builds up his thematic evolution in composing a symphony. I think of the consummate mastery of Jane Austen in her six novels as they display this craftsmanship of the gradually increasing emphasis as one event follows another with an ever brighter revelation of the characters responsible for those events. We must all feel that it would have been a great thing if Jane Austen had written her autobiography, as she probably would have done, had she lived for another twenty-five years. But some readers will ask how can a woman, a comfortably off spinster, produce enough material to fill out an autobiography. But we know the answer to that criticism. Jane Austen could have written a volume about the contents of her dressing table, and it would have been intensely exciting. It would have been graphic. It would have been true. And the relative positions of the hairbrush and the mirror would have developed into a drama that somehow, by sheer magic and divine insight, would have meant a revelation of universal and eternal values.

It is not the events, the facts in themselves ; it is what is done with them. The writer adds them up in such a way that they exceed their sum, just as in a love affair the addition of two lips to two lips makes more than four lips. It makes a marriage of true minds, or at least a temporary ecstasy. And the writing of an autobiography is a love affair. It is a declaration by the writer to the rest of humanity, an offering of himself as a unit of judgement by which mortal life is being tested. It is an answer to the question "Is life worth living?" Even if the autobiographer says that it is not, he gives the lie to him-



self by the very fact of attempting this difficult art, and of confiding in the fellow-creatures whom he professes to despise or distrust.

Thus there must be a certain naïveté in the person who undertakes this job. His purpose is confessional; and that means humility. This is quite contrary to what some people say about the autobiographer. They condemn his purpose as being arrogant, boastful, the ambition of a monomaniac. So it may seem, but in the end it comes down to this desire to be seen in a good light. And what is this but a reflection of love, respect and reverence? We do not show off unless we feel deep in our hearts that the person we are boasting to is larger, better and more impressive than ourselves.

But this has led me away from the all-important point of selecting the significant materials and the incidents, the moods and highlights, and indeed the low lights, which are to build up brick by brick into the fabric of the autobiography. But what do I mean by significant materials? It is difficult to explain except by example, and I would like to offer a passage from the first volume of my own autobiography in which the tiny adventure recorded plays a symbolical part, in a direct and patent way, in the drama of self-discovery which, after all, is the fundamental purpose of all literary practice, and especially of the art of autobiography.

This passage relates to the dawning imagination of a child who is quickly to awaken to a sense of destiny in his own life which makes him determined to strike out from that early age toward a course that shall lead him into a discipline habitual with unremitting intensity. That discipline is to be one of literature, with all that it involves in the mastery of language, and the personal drive towards scholarship and a philosophical coherence in his wrestling match with life.

The translation of all this vague and overweening ambition into terms of something, some practical symbol of concise aspect, was the problem with which I had to contend at this stage in the story. And as the stage was in the field of infancy, the symbol had to be elementary while being related in some way to the first phase in the process of vision. What more appropriate than the acquiring of a pair of spectacles? So that is the setting and the selected symbol for this passage.

'A medical examination at school had revealed the fact that I

### *The Art of Autobiography*

was short-sighted. The doctor took me solemnly between his knees, looked into my face, and said, "If you don't get some glasses, you'll be blind by the time you are fifteen, and I shall tell your parents so."

'I was rather proud of this distinction. Fifteen ! That was so far ahead that it meant nothing to me, except a sort of twilight at the end of life. My parents thought otherwise, and one Saturday afternoon I was taken, via a steep road called Pig Hill, to a chemist's shop on Lavender Hill, Clapham, opposite the first theatre that I was ever to enter, "The Shakespear". Behind the shop was a room where my eyes were tested in the rough and ready way customary in those days. The chemist hung an open framework that felt like the Forth Bridge around my ears and on my nose. Lenses were slotted into this, and twisted about, while I was instructed to read the card of letters beginning with a large "E".

'I remember still the astonishment with which I saw the smaller letters change from a dark blur into separate items of the alphabet. I thought about it all the following week, and found that by screwing up my eyes when I was out of doors, I could get to some faint approximation of that clarity, for a few seconds at a time.

'This made me surmise that the universe which hitherto I had seen as a vague mass of colour and blurred shapes, might in actuality be much more concise and defined. I was therefore half prepared for the surprise which shook me a week later when, on the Saturday evening, we went again to the shop on Lavender Hill, and the chemist produced the bespoke pair of steel-rimmed spectacles through which I was invited to read the card. I read it, from top to bottom ! I turned, and looked in triumph at Mother, but what I saw was Mother intensified. I saw the pupils of her eyes, the tiny feathers in her boa necklet ; I saw the hairs in Father's moustache, and on the back of his hand. Jack's cap might have been made of metal, so hard and clear did it shine on his close-cropped head, above his bony face and huge nose. I saw *his* eyes too, round, enquiring, fierce with a hunger of observation. He was studying me with a gimlet sharpness such as I had never before been able to perceive.

'Then we walked out of the shop, and I stepped on to the pavement which came up and hit me, so that I had to grasp the nearest

support—Father's coat. "Take care, now, take care!" he said, indulgently (though he disapproved of all these concessions to physical weakness). "And mind you don't break them!"

'I walked still with some uncertainty, carefully placing my feet and feeling their impact on the pavement whose surface I could see sparkling like quartz in the lamplight.

'The lamplight! I looked in wonder at the diminishing crystals of gasflame strung down the hill. Clapham was hung with necklaces of light, and the horses pulling the glittering omnibuses struck the granite road with hooves of iron and ebony. I could see the skeletons inside the flesh and blood of the Saturday-night shoppers. The garments they wore were made of separate threads. In this new world, sound as well as sight was changed. It took on hardness and definition, forcing itself upon my hearing, so that I was besieged simultaneously through the eye and through the ear.

'How willingly I surrendered! I went out to meet this blazing and trumpeting invasion. I trembled with the excitement, and had to cling to Mother's arm to prevent myself being carried away in the flood as the pavements rushed at me, and people loomed up with their teeth like tusks, their lips luscious, their eyes bolting out of their heads, bearing down on me as they threw out spears of conversation that whizzed loudly past my ears and bewildered my wits.

"Is it any different?" asked Jack, in his proprietary voice. He was never satisfied until he had collected all possible information on everything which life brought to his notice.

"It makes things clearer," I replied, knowing that I had no hope of telling him what was happening to me. I was only half aware of it myself, for this urgent demand upon my attention made by the multitudinous world around me, was the beginning of a joyous imposition to which I am still responding today, breathless and enraptured, though the twilight of the senses begins to settle.

'My excitement must have communicated itself to the rest of the family, for Father proposed that instead of our going home to supper, we should have the meal at The Creighton, an Italian restaurant near Clapham Junction. This was the first time in my

### *The Art of Autobiography*

life that I ate in public, and I remember it so clearly because the table cloth appeared to be made of white ropes in warp and woof, and the cutlery had an additional hardness, beyond that of ordinary steel and plate. When the food came to the table, the steam rising from it was as coarse as linen. I saw the spots of grease on the waiter's apron, and the dirt under his finger nails.

'All this emphasis made me shy, as I would have been, indeed, without this optical exaggeration that had the effect of thrusting me forward, to be seen as conspicuously as I now saw everything and everybody around me. But I ate my fried plaice, dissecting it with a new skill, since every bone was needle-clear. Our parents drank stout, their usual supper glass. Jack and I had ginger-beer, a rare luxury that added to the formality of the feast.

'By the time we reached the darker streets near home, my head ached under the burden of too much seeing. Perhaps the grease of the fried fish, and the lateness of the hour, had something to do with the exhaustion that almost destroyed me as we trailed homeward. The new spectacles clung to my face, eating into the bridge of my nose and behind the ear-lobes. I longed to tear them off and throw them away into the darkness. I tried to linger behind, so that at least I might secrete them in the pocket of my blouse.

'But before I could further this purpose, something caught my attention. I realised that after all, the side-streets were not quite dark; that the yellow pools round each gaslamp, now as clearly defined as golden sovereigns, were augmented, pervaded, suffused by a bluish silver glory. I looked upward, and saw the sky. And in that sky I saw an almost full moon, floating in space, a solid ball of roughened metal, with an irregular jagged edge. I could put up my hand and take it, ponder its weight, feel its cold surface.

'I stopped walking, and stared. I turned up my face, throwing back my head to look vertically into the zenith. I saw the stars, and I saw them for the first time, a few only, for most were obscured by the light of the moon; but those I saw were clean pin-points of light, diamond-hard, standing not upon a velvet surface, but floating in space, some near, some far, in an awe-striking perspective that came as a revelation to my newly educated

eyes. I felt myself swept up into that traffic of the night sky. I floated away, and might have disappeared into space had not a cry recalled me.

'It was Mother's voice, in alarm, for she had looked round, perhaps impatiently, to urge me along, only to see me lying on my back on the pavement, in a state of semi-coma. Father picked me up, and I was still too far gone to resent being carried like a baby. I knew, however, that Jack would have something to say when we got to bed, for he would accuse me of showing off, or creating a scene. He had a horror of any form of demonstration, and he discouraged extravagance and self-indulgence, two weaknesses which he was always prepared to detect in me, and to correct.'<sup>1</sup>

It may be suggested, after hearing this little adventure, that the autobiographer tends to be much too introspective a person to be a healthy member of society. It need not necessarily be so, for the very process of self-revelation acts, as I have said earlier, as a kind of confessional, whose cathartic effect brings health and new life to the penitent. For indeed autobiography, by the very pain involved in the exploration, is a form of penitence, especially for those who tend to be self-concerned. The purification has a purifying effect and gives the individual a clarity of mind which augurs well for his future relationships with his fellow creatures. I think of Goethe, and Joseph Conrad, whose writings about themselves had this clarifying effect and added a cubit to their already colossal stature. Even unpleasant persons of supreme egoism, such as Richard Wagner and Rousseau, induced in themselves a kind of synthetic innocence which acted in the same way as a more unsophisticated virtue, leading to a considerate and responsible estimate of their own importance *vis-à-vis* their neighbours.

But whatever the moral significance, and the social utility of the art of autobiography, it is always about human beings who have enough imagination to have driven themselves to this remarkable undertaking, which demands laborious days in a discipline that in the long run singles them out for some form of reward, even if it is only to be the mild derision of posterity. Where the autobiographer has

<sup>1</sup> From *Over The Bridge* by kind permission of William Heinemann Ltd.

*The Art of Autobiography*

accepted the fullest responsibilities of the task, which is to relate his individual spirit to the vast mystery of the little things of life, and to tie them together with the golden threads of the art of language, then he will have achieved something which is likely to give delight to generation after generation of readers, people who are also seeking after truth in this matter of the individual and his marriage to the universe.

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## *I Need a Friend*

BY ELIZABETH BERRIDGE

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"YOU know," said Pye, "it was one of the worst moments of my life. There was this man, with the party roaring round him; the women with their teeth gleaming and eyes shining and hats nudging, and the men gently sweating and trying to impress anyone near enough to hear—although that was almost an impossibility, you know how all those trivial conversations build up into a noise like the Severn bore, sweeping right across the room—"

"For God's sake, Pye, we've all been to parties. What happened?"

"Well, there was this man. He was pretty drunk. He stood there looking around, looking desperate, I thought. I was feeling pretty desperate myself, after shouting pleasantries into cardboard faces for a couple of hours. He stood quite still—he was a big man, with an oddly small head and that transparent skin of the very fair, and I could see the blood fairly coursing through a vein above his left eye—and suddenly he lifted up his chin and gave a great shout. 'I need a friend!' he shouted. Then again, 'I need a friend!' The room stilled. It was extraordinary. Everyone looked at him, then away. Someone shouted, 'Mind my bike!' There was a scattered tittering. People moved away. Someone called across, 'We all need a friend, old chap!' and a tipsy woman started to sing 'There's a Friend a—bove, who has my lo—ove . . .'"

"Here," said Stefan, "get this whisky down. You need it."

"This man," Pye went on, holding the glass in his hand, "I saw he was going to burst into tears. For some reason I couldn't let that happen. Because the crowd there—or most of them—really thought he'd taken over some sort of new catch-phrase they'd be hearing on the telly quite soon. I wanted to get him out before they realised that he'd broken the most important convention of all; showing emotion and a real need in public. That thin skin on which we all skate, you



### *I Need a Friend*

know? So I took him by the arm and began to lead him out and we looked at one another. He was pretty glazed by that time, and when he got to the door he turned back and said it again, but differently. He sort of threw it helplessly into all those pink faces, spiky with laughter." Pye was silent, drank his whisky at speed.

"What did you say to him?" asked Nika.

"I didn't get a chance to say anything." Pye's blue eyes suddenly blazed with laughter. "When I got him outside at last he lowered his face into mine and said, 'I don't want a friend with a beard, blast you,' and knocked me down. When I got up he'd gone."

"Poor swine," said Stefan.

"I knew you'd still be up, so I came straight here."

It was very late. Through the open windows of that top room came the noise of the first lorries arriving in Covent Garden Market. They lurched past where, earlier, queues had stood outside the Opera House. Spencer stood at one window, looking down, calculating how easy it would be to spit on the orange-coloured netting sacks bulging with cabbages and carrots and onions. It was too easy, for they passed crawling in bottom gear as the drivers manoeuvred skilfully down the narrow street. Nika, Spencer's wife, tenderly examined Pye's face for damage, parting the fine, close, greyish beard with long fingers.

"There's no mark, Pye," she said. "But you ought to have some coffee. May I make some, Stefan? I know where you keep everything." She hesitated as Stefan nodded, and with her hand on the door leading to the small kitchen, said, "I know how you feel, Pye. I passed a man a week or two ago standing in the street, pressed up against the window of an empty shop. He wasn't selling anything, just looking into people's faces as they passed. He seemed to be holding something out, so I looked. It was a torn cigarette packet, and scrawled on it was 'Please help me, folks.' I gave him half a crown and went on. Now I shop in another direction."

"You didn't tell me this," said Spencer.

"No," she said, turning the handle and going into the kitchen. "I felt too sick."

The men glanced at one another. Stefan said, "Poor Nika. But then everywhere, all the time, someone is screaming for help. I feel



sick every time I have to go into a public lavatory: all those desperate, obsessive graffiti . . ."

Spencer gave a short laugh. He was wondering why Nika had not told him of this if it had upset her. She used to tell him everything. "I wonder what the chap did after he left you?" he murmured. "Of course, Pye, you asked for it."

"Of course." Pye walked restlessly up and down. He stopped to look at a painting on the wall, listened to the confused shouts from the street. "You're certainly in contact with life here, Stefan. You can't bear to lose it even at night, can you?"

Stefan lifted his hands in surrender. "I love it," he said, "I wouldn't live anywhere else. It's another London surging up when the daytime one dies. It's a kind of rebirth every midnight."

"It's contact, not communication."

"I can communicate all right, if that's what's bothering you. I can put on a sweater and flannels and walk right down there in among them and drink tea and they talk to me. It's because I'm so obviously a Jew. A lot of us work in the market."

"That's nothing to do with it, sucker," said Spencer, "I bet I could do the same."

Pye shook his head. "Your voice is all wrong," he said. "But that isn't what I meant. I can't help thinking of that poor devil. Everyone has so much in common today that real communication is almost non-existent. Eye might meet eye across a crowded bus, and for one second there's communication—but it can't be followed up. You can't hold a moment like that in the hand, just as you can't hold happiness. We talk an awful lot, but we only really communicate for moments at a time—and we—here—are the lucky ones."

Nika walked into the silence that followed his words and began to pour coffee.

"How noisy the lorries are tonight, Stefan," she remarked, "I don't know how you sleep through it."

"I need very little sleep. Anyway, there's the room at the back, it's quieter."

Pye started to speak again as if he had never finished his sentence. He stirred his coffee thoughtfully, settling into a chair. "Yes, we're lucky. We're holding out. You know what I mean. People react

### *I Need a Friend*

to a common reactor: television, cartoon strips, traffic jams, vulgar advertisements, gossip columns, the Royal family . . . and they're losing the power of reacting to each other. We've been losing it, in fact, since the beginning of the nineteenth century. So that a man can stand in the middle of a room, surrounded by people he presumably knows, or thinks he does, and can shout aloud in agony, 'I need a friend!' And when someone tries to get through, he punches him in the face."

"But we must learn to accept aloneness," said Stefan impatiently. "Your man was a fool to expect any response to his shout. He didn't really expect it—or even want it—that was why he punched you. You had encroached. Now a whisper would have been different."

"A man doesn't always want to whisper."

Stefan gestured. "We must accept aloneness," he said again. "It's the only way we can learn about ourselves, and that means God, who is after all nothing more than a contorted reflection of ourselves."

Spencer smiled indulgently, and settled back in expectation, but only Nika exclaimed at what was to her mere blasphemous bantering, and Stefan, delighted at this reaction, at once turned to Pye, vastly encouraged.

"Well, Pye, there's your man standing out in the middle of this dreary party, shouting out of his black loneliness and inability to communicate. Of course, he might just be drunk and lusting for all that tempting man-or-woman-flesh standing around. But you're a romantic, you see him as God, and so will I for the sake of an argument. All right . . ."—he ignored Pye's gesture of protest—"who is he but God? God who created colour and light and mad-looking vegetation among all those cooling rocks, and pricked out the stars with his thumb and set the sun and the moon in place. Then he looked round in horror at the loneliness of it all. 'I need a friend,' he whispered to himself—yes, he'd *whisper* that. So on the fifth day he created Life . . ."

At once Spencer began to conduct, and sang the appropriate bars from Handel's *Creation*—*And God created great whales* . . .—then waved him to go on.

"And apart from the whales," pursued Stefan, with a slight bow, "out came everything that crept and hopped and flapped. Out they

came from the grey mud, from that first great watery womb, instinctual. Down flew birds, crying like curlews in astonishment at being there at all. But they can't speak to Him, so He's no better off. *They* can't smile at Him with love. So on the sixth day He cries aloud among all the bird and animal noises and the roar of the waters and the humming of the stars: 'I need a friend!' So He makes a mammoth effort this time and creates man in His own image. That was poor old Adam, His first big let-down. Why? Because Adam is too like God Himself to be able to love Him and anyway he's too innocent to know what God is or what love is. God can't live with him—he can't claim him as Friend (note the capital F), because Adam is scared stiff."

"Come now, Stefan, how can he be scared stiff if he's in a state of innocence? If he can't love, he can't know fear. Innocence is a pure state."

Stefan waved the objection aside. "Who wouldn't be scared of his creator? I say he can't smile at God with love, which is what God wanted desperately." He tried to meet Nika's eye, but she merely filled his cup and wandered over to the window. She was held like an unwilling child to a frightening story. Spencer lay stretched in the shadows; Pye lighted another cigarette. No one spoke.

"Poor old Adam," sighed Stefan, enjoying himself. "He can't respond to this tremendous light that pours over him and burns him up, because he doesn't know how. There's something missing. God's left something out of this lush garden created for His favourite. He suddenly realises that somehow he has projected His own loneliness on to Adam. Everything else in the universe is spawning, and reproducing, flowering and falling, dying and being reborn. Adam is forever part of that process, as much as God, being complete in Himself, is forever outside it. This He accepts. So He goes back to Adam, and while he is asleep takes a rib out of his side and creates woman—to break Adam's loneliness and complete the Creation."

Nika made a sudden violent movement. "As an afterthought, and the very last thing to be created!" she exclaimed bitterly.

"An afterthought, yes," said Stefan, winking at the others. "But being created last gives a woman the right to the last word—which she has had ever since. Because Adam doesn't look at God any more

after that, not even in terror. From the moment he wakes up and finds that gift beside him, his eyes are veiled from God. Instead, he looks at Eve and smiles at *her* with love. Because here is a love he instinctively understands and can use."

Pye interrupted him lazily.

"You've forgotten the handicap—God played fair when He knew He was one up on Adam in the little matter of good and evil."

Stefan looked blank, then his voice sprang out again. "Do you call putting the tree of knowledge there playing fair? Telling Adam in effect that the flowers are not for him to pick? Making sure it was the first temptation? Testing His own product?"

"He had every right to. And He gave Adam an even chance. There was the choice between knowing the woman and knowing God. Adam chose the woman, mortality, and suffering."

"And in revenge," Spencer put in, "God cut them both off from the tree of life."

"That's what I said," murmured Pye. "Adam chose mortality."

"He didn't think of anything else but the apple Eve held out, and as if she could resist that challenge, even without the serpent!" Nika burst out. "How you do complicate things! Adam never thought at all. He was used to Eve giving him things. They weren't to know it was an aphrodisiac."

There was a shout of laughter.

"Well, that's certainly a new interpretation: you could start a splendid heresy with that idea," said Stefan. "So you think Adam was amply compensated, Nika? With God decently veiled from him and Eve still in the first flush of that delicious semi-nakedness and dawning sensuality, and no other man to lust after her. Yes, that must have been bliss at first. I should say they were chased from that garden singing."

"I wouldn't say they sang for long, with all that God threatened them; sweat and sorrow and fear and subjection. Don't forget that Adam had once known God in all His purity and beauty. His was the first *angst*."

Spencer stretched and got up. "We must go, it's after three," he said. "Still, I find your allegory entertaining if not convincing, Stefan. But think," he added suddenly, at the door, "what different

creatures we would all have been if God hadn't turned those two out of Eden ! He sowed the first niggles of doubt and guilt and jealousy and divine retribution—not the serpent. Think of it, flawing His own creation."

"For I thy God am a jealous God . . . that's the core of our western tragedy. The hubris, the nemesis, the tortures, the terrible implacability . . . Oh, I know I like to think of myself as a victim," said Stefan, his voice tired and flat, "but I'm no more a victim than any of you."

Pye gave him his warm, embracing smile. "Well then, Stefan, if you realise that, your intimate, inside story of Lovers Expelled from Eden has some point."

They walked downstairs, Stefan switching on lights as they did so, passing the darkened silent offices on the second floor, the packing-room on the first, and so into the street, lighted and alive with movement.

Spencer stood looking around him with pleasure : there was a cool, bruised smell. Then, taking Nika's arm, he nodded goodnight and walked her away, his head still alight with the resentment Stefan's fantasy had called up. For Adam's problem was his own.

A moment later Pye left Stefan standing on the step, biting his knuckles in concentration. He stood there long after Pye had disappeared down the street, then at last went in and closed the door. Inside story of lovers expelled from Paradise. Maybe Pye had something there ; a de Mille epic with all the trappings and the false, rotten heart of heresy. Still, treated as myth . . . Sighing, he ascended to his high room, to spin more dreams before the day began.

Pye walked along briskly, instinctively avoiding the angled, parked lorries and the busy brooms which cleared away crushed cabbage leaves, squashed tomatoes, packing-straw, all the debris spilled from boxes and crates. On the long, covered pavement fronting the cobbles three men practised golf shots with sticks and a few loose Spanish onions. The sound of iron wheels on stone rumbled from inside the market, innocent tumbrils. Under the false, pillared front of St. Paul's Church men drank coffee at a stall. The atmosphere was curiously rural, how fitting that Inigo Jones should have called his church the finest barn in Europe ! As he turned into King Street

### *I Need a Friend*

a man called to him from the open front of a shop where he was stacking lettuces and onions on one side and apples and oranges on the other, and threw him an apple. Smiling his thanks, Pye caught it and walked on, munching.

Then he was suddenly looking into an empty shop that might have been a snack bar by day. There, in the emptiness at the back, an old man stood, slicing bread with a machine, utterly absorbed. The light bulb swung above, striking desultory gleams from his bald head. The concentration of that solitary figure brought back the memory of another, temporarily forgotten. In the silence Pye seemed to hear again that desperate appeal . . . for it *had* been an appeal, whether the man was drunk or not.

*I need a friend.*

. . . and whether he was drunk or not was incidental. Drunkenness merely unlocked doors of the mind, to reveal many an incongruous prisoner bemused by his temporary freedom. Pye could not bear other people's loneliness, yet his own sense of aloneness was necessary to him, and voluntary. It was a quiet cell into which he withdrew, to replenish his strength.

*I need a friend.*

Pye was haunted by a sense of failure. It was not often people resented him ; maybe his own warmth had been too much, an intrusion, as Stefan had perceived. But if a man felt driven to shout out his need in such circumstances, was it because he had betrayed each friend he had made because of a peculiar, sadistic pleasure in first achieving intimacy, then crumpling it like paper and tossing it away ? Or was he one of those unfortunate people who were quite unaware of some element in themselves which repelled intimacy ?

*I need a friend.*

But what was a friend ? Both confessor and confessee, the screens down. Was such absolute mutual trust, the Greek ideal, possible only in adolescence, possible only between young men or young women, and only rarely between man and woman ? Wasn't it only possible at that poised moment when the clear childhood stream met the rushing, fouled river of adulthood with its half-knowledge, prejudices, its lies and evasions ? Pye shook his head. Too easy, too generalised. It could happen any time, with anyone ; that was why



Elizabeth Berridge

life was worth living. But one became wary with age, unwilling to risk one's vulnerability, fearing to offer the fragile cup full of one's own distilled essence ; and warier still of accepting another's. It was still like the childhood pacts sworn in the deep secrecy of attics or woods, thumbs cut on penknife blades, the mingling of blood. Here was a brother to share your fear and your loneliness, another *you* walking about, an extension of your own fear and delight. Effortless communication and understanding.

*I need a friend.*

Pye passed the stilled fountains of Trafalgar Square, walking diagonally towards Whitehall, the impressive bulk of the National Gallery behind him. Through the Arch lay St. James's Park, the ducks quiet, the grass recovering from the assault of many feet, the water cool and secretive. He had always responded to the self-containedness of London lakes. But then, by this time, all London was mysterious and magical, for the violated country seemed to stir under its stones and behind its buildings ; each plane tree an outpost awaiting its opportunity to take over.

A cruising taxi passed and he saluted the driver, feeling that they alone owned the city. For the birds, who would awaken at dawn, very soon now, had not yet put in their first piping claim. A man emerged from a sewer near Scotland Yard, then vanished.

*I need a friend.*

Friends were like ships signalling, like these sleepless traffic lights ; the warning, the beckoning, the stop. One had to read them accurately or invite a punch on the jaw. The desolate seas, like these streets, would be featureless without them. What port are you bound for ? What have you seen to the nor'-nor'-east ? Mermaids or typhoons or the white back of Moby Dick ? Friends were extra eyes, extra limbs . . . he was very tired and a fragment swam through his head, 'lamps for my gloom, hands guiding where I stumble' . . . but the poet meant the deathless dead, their tried words would never wound or betray, nor forsake.

He leant on the bridge at Westminster and remembered Penelope Hinton. Here had been his first real contact with her. She had talked about the lights—the reflections, she had said, were really other lights held up from the river bottom by the ghosts of suicides. Suicides.

### *I Need a Friend*

He looked deep into the noncommittal water, his mind flinching away from the one thought that had lain there like a silent watcher all night long, only rising now with the sun, into full sight. He knew now what the man had done after he knocked him down. Knew beyond reason and beyond any logical doubt.

That cry, that repudiation. After the failure of the private whisper, the public shout. Then at what point in a man's or a woman's life did communication with other people become impossible? When did a hand held out in friendship become a weapon? No one called out like that until he was past being able to give or receive in friendship or love. Was that perhaps the final loneliness? Was it at that precise moment the trap closed forever?

*I need a friend.*

He shivered as Big Ben struck five and the birds took over London. The first traffic had been stirring for some time before he moved away. A policeman strolled by, glanced sharply at him, then decided to nod civilly.

"Lovely morning, sir," he said.

It was really far too early, but Penelope's mews house lay behind Victoria towards Pimlico. He could be there in a quarter of an hour. He started to walk quickly, compulsively, shaken out of his usual serenity by a bubbling panic. He had never in his life measured his own need and he was too tired to do more than acknowledge it now. As he went briskly along his legs moved automatically, like a man at the end of a long journey, and he caught himself wondering just how much love came into friendship—and how was friendship different from love? But he was too sleepy—too unwilling—and altogether unable to answer his own question.



## *My Dragon*

BY VERNON BARTLETT

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FEW people visit the old reservoir for, until recently, it was haunted by Communist terrorists who lived in the jungle within a few miles of Kuala Lumpur. And still fewer people follow the path through the jungle by the side of one of its small tributary streams. So that, if one walked quietly and inconspicuously along it, one might occasionally see a troop of monkeys leaping thirty feet or so from tree to tree; a pair of flying squirrels gliding under the high canopy; or a rhinoceros hornbill flapping noisily and clumsily in the branches a hundred and fifty feet overhead. The emphasis must be on 'occasionally,' for the chances were that one would see nothing moving at all, except, perhaps, a leech standing on its tail on a stalk of grass and swaying to and fro, stimulated by the smell of a human being. But just when a series of blank days made me wonder whether I should not be happier at the club, with someone to talk to and something to drink, my patience would be rewarded.

Never better than on the day when I found my dragon.

An animal about eighteen inches long leapt out of a bush on my right and ran across the path to the stream, here neatly canalised in concrete. It paused on the brink until some small movement of mine caused it to jump into the shallow water and to run along the concrete bed. It did so with a clumsiness which revealed that water was not its normal element and, running along the bank, I had no difficulty in catching up with it. Whereupon it abandoned all idea of escape, and waited for the end. It would even have drowned itself, for the water came just above its head, unless I had pulled it out of the stream with the crook of my stick and placed it on the concrete slope of the bank.

And there we stood, each examining the other with amazement and fear. Yes, fear even on my side, despite my much greater bulk,

### *My Dragon*

for this small dragon was quite unlike any animal I had ever seen, and the unknown is nearly always alarming.

The bumps above the creature's eyes gave its face a toad-like appearance. Its body was covered with rough, brownish skin, which was as loose as the skin on the hands of old people. The tree lizards I had seen all had bodies that tapered away to a long tail; my dragon's tail was quite distinct from the body and was marked with alternating circles of brown and white, each about an inch wide. Along its spine, from the top of its head to the end of its body, there ran a narrow ridge of stiff bristles, about as long as the bristles of a toothbrush. Its front legs were like those of a terribly skinny human being; they made me think of Chinese emaciated by years of starvation and opium smoking. And, under its chin, were three most improbable blobs, one bright red, one bright green and one bright purple, the purpose of which, I suppose, was to create alarm.

Could the creature bite? Were its bristles poisonous, like the fins of some fish? Could it spit venom like a snake? Cautiously, with my stick, I tested the stiffness of its bristles, and it opened its jaws and hissed at me.

The inside of its mouth was of a delicate pink, and it had no teeth. My fear was suddenly replaced by a kind of affection. The coloured blobs, the bristles, the hissing were all bluff. To my dragon, I must appear as large and as omnipotent as God. Does God, I wondered, feel a similar affectionate sympathy for the boastful claims of man, a pity somehow mixed with admiration for his pathetic gestures of defiance?

Having decided that my dragon was harmless, I played with the idea of bringing it home and trying to tame it. It might be very rare, in which case the Nature Society would treat me with respect and gratitude. It would anyhow appear rare in the eyes of my friends, most of whom visited the jungle less often than I. But soon I became ashamed of this foolish passion for possession. If this creature was so terrified, even in its natural surroundings, what would happen to it if I were to carry it home in my handkerchief, and to put it in a cage to be gaped at by my friends? I had trespassed on its territory; not it on mine, and I had so frightened it that it was in a state of catalepsy; when I made a sudden movement, it made no correspond-

*Vernon Bartlett*

ing movement to escape. It was literally paralysed with fear. I walked away out of sight, and returned some five minutes later. It was still there, unable even to open its pink mouth and to hiss at me.

This complete surrender filled me with humility. I wondered whether any jungle animal even bulkier than I would cause a similar paralysis. Man boasts of his power to reason, to distinguish between good and evil. This cataleptic fear amounted to an accusation that he—in this case, I—had misused his power.

The experts had no difficulty in identifying the creature as one of the agamid lizards. To me, it remains a dragon. A small and helpless dragon but, nevertheless, one able to remind me that, by driving Adam out of the Garden of Eden, the angel with a flaming sword condemned his sons even in the eyes of the other creatures that dwelt therein.

## The King Dictates

BY A. N. G. RICHARDS

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THIS article was first suggested by a book—I mean a book in the physical sense, sheets of folded paper covered with marks in ink and bound in leather. The identity and personality of the original writer and owner, and the subject and circumstances of his writing, give it a unique interest.

A year ago, for about a fortnight, I had it in my care, and often in my hands. Bound in calf and armed back and front like most of its three thousand companions, it came from the library of Samuel Pepys, which under the terms of his will went to Magdalene College, Cambridge, in 1724. It bears the title *Royal Escape*.

Early in October of the year 1680, the Court being then at Newmarket, Charles II dictated to Samuel Pepys, who had, it would seem, accompanied the Court, an account of his escape after his defeat at Worcester, twenty-nine years before. Pepys took the narrative down in shorthand on Sunday 3rd and Tuesday 5th, and later he transcribed his notes in his fine bold long-hand, adding to the original version comments and a few corrections of his own, together with notes procured from the king and other persons who figured in the story. In due course, he had the two documents bound up together. The shorthand is written in a book about the size and shape of a small school exercise book; the long-hand on much larger sheets, which were folded for binding round the small book; the whole forms a quarto volume about 14 by 9½ inches.

This was the book that I found in my hand, and what thoughts it prompted! The shorthand itself, for example. It is written by the same system that Pepys used in his diary—that evolved by Thomas Shelton and first published by him under the name of *Tachygraphy* in 1638. No one knows when Pepys taught himself the method, but when he began the diary on January 1st, 1660, he was completely



CHARLES SECOND



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master of it. The first page is a model of neatness, and obviously the work of someone writing naturally and unhesitatingly ; and it is the same, page after page, throughout the 3,012 pages of the six volumes that he filled during the next nine years. Then, as is well known, he discontinued the diary because his sight began to fail : and though he still employed the method for notes and letters, he doubtless used it neither as freely nor as regularly as before. So when eleven years later he writes at the King's dictation his pages show evident signs of haste and uncertainty.

The Diary stood on the shelves of the Library, not unknown, but certainly unconsidered, for a century or more after Pepys' death in 1703, and it was not till early in the last century that the question of deciphering it was looked into. Several experts declared that the secret of the writing would never be penetrated. The matter was referred to Lord Grenville. He examined the volumes and evolved some kind of key, and finally in 1819 an undergraduate of St. John's College, John Smith, undertook to decipher and transcribe the whole diary. This he did, in three years, working sometimes twelve or fourteen hours a day, and often far into the night. But did he know—did anybody know?—that elsewhere in the Library there was not only a copy of the latest edition of Shelton's handbook, published in 1691, but also this MS. volume—a kind of Rosetta stone, with hieroglyphics and transcription complete—every sign and syllable in Pepys' hand?

What took the King's mind back, that autumn day, to his astonishing adventures twenty-nine years before, at just that time? It was not the first occasion that Pepys had heard him speak of them. Twenty years earlier he had been Secretary to the Generals of the Fleet which crossed to Holland to fetch the King home, and the diary for May 23rd, 1660, describes how the King walked to and fro on the quarter-deck, as they sailed towards Dover in the marvellous summer weather, and recalled his escapes, some perilous, some absurd, before his years of exile began.

But this is a full account, as complete as the teller could make it, and one is tempted to think there was some reason for King Charles to make the sustained effort just then. Some months after it was known that his account had been taken down, his brother James,



### *The King Dictates*

Duke of York, urgently requested Pepys for a copy ; in Pepys' reply one may sense a complacent note of achievement, as if something often promised or postponed had at last been performed. He sent the Duke—the master whom he had served so loyally for so long—an immediate transcript, with a promise that another would follow, enlarged with all the thoroughness that years of work in his great office had made habitual to him and with all that insatiable interest in life and men that always burnt in him.

But why was the story told at all just then ? Perhaps it was simply because Pepys made the request and the King was in the mood to satisfy him. It was an appropriate time for both men to share a tale of protracted danger and ultimate escape. The King had almost weathered the furious storm stirred up two years earlier by Titus Oates—that McCarthy of his age, may one call him ?—but was still perilously engaged in the fierce and intricate struggle with Shaftesbury over the succession to the throne : while Pepys himself had but lately escaped from deadly danger, having been forced from office by false accusation of treasonable correspondence with France with intent to dethrone the King and forward the imposition of Roman Catholicism in England ; had been committed to the Tower ; and had only by long and anxious labour and huge expense finally established his innocence. Buffeted by these violent tempests, may it not have refreshed them to look back to the time of their youth, when one was an inconspicuous undergraduate at a lesser Cambridge College, and the other, though a rightful King and fresh from overwhelming defeat in the field, was also a young man of twenty-one, devoting all the resilience and resourcefulness of his nature to the relatively simple practical end of eluding his enemies and saving his life ?

Be that as it may, the story was told. And told in a rapid, trenchant style, well exemplified in the opening sentences. 'After that the battle was so absolutely lost as to be beyond hope of recovery, I began to think of the best way of saving myself ; and the first thought that came into my head was that if I could possibly, I would get to London as soon, if not sooner, than the news of our defeat could get thither—and it being near dark, I talked with some especially with my Lord Rochester, who was then Wilmot, about their opinions which would be the best way for me to escape, it being



impossible, as I thought, to get back into Scotland. I found them mightily distracted !' How detached, practical and cool that is. True, the speaker is looking back twenty-nine years, but as one reads on, one quickly forms the impression that he was cool and practical at the time, and amid all the hardships, severe discomforts, unremitting anxiety and occasional acute dangers, he was always buoyant and able to look at his successive predicaments with sardonic amusement.

A very full account of the King's escape was published shortly after the Restoration based on material obtained from all manner of people concerned in it, and full of incidents that he naturally knew nothing of at the time. Several of the participants later published accounts of what was particularly known to themselves. All the available material has been used by Sir Arthur Bryant and, more recently, by Mr. Hesketh Pearson in their lives of King Charles. Here I am concerned with the King's own story, and now refer briefly to its character, and to a few of the episodes contained in it, using his own words wherever possible.

In the first place the story is fascinatingly told. The opening sentences have already been quoted ; here are two or three paragraph beginnings, taken almost at random :

'We went that night about twenty miles to a place called White Ladies where we stopt and got some refreshment of bread and cheese, such as we could get, it being just beginning to be day.'

'But we had not gone two hours on our way but the mare I rode on cast a shoe, so we were forced to ride to get another shoe at a scattering village. And as I was holding my horse's foot, I asked the smith what news.'

'Just as we came into the town I could see the streets full of redcoats, Cromwell's soldiers . . . at which Frank Windham was very much startled and asked me what I would do. I told him we must go impudently into the best inn in the town and take a chamber there, as the only thing to be done.'

'As soon as I came into the stable, I took the bridle of the horses

### *The King Dictates*

and called the hostler to me to help me. And as the hostler was helping me to feed the horses "Sure, sir," says the hostler, "I know your face?"—which was no very pleasant question to me. . . .

This speaker has the basic story-teller's art ; one wants at every point to know what happened next. He uses throughout this simple, racy English—the English of a well-bred man at his ease but alert to his story, with no attempt at conscious effect but never for a moment flat.

It is a story of action and event ; there is little reflection and almost no feeling : men and women appear and disappear with the enigmatic silence of figures seen from a railway carriage. Old and young, humble and great, they play their part and are gone—always at risk of their life, and with complete indifference to the very large reward offered by the Parliament for the apprehension of Charles Stuart, son of the late tyrant, and traitorous invader of the land, 'a tall man above two yards high, with dark brown hair, scarcely to be distinguished from black.' What loyalty, courage and devotion they showed. Nor were they forgotten ; everyone was sought out and rewarded at the Restoration. But in the King's story he confines himself to what happened ; how it happened, we learn from others.

It was on September 3rd, 1651, a Wednesday, that he conferred with Wilmot and others as darkness fell, and on another Wednesday, October 15th, six weeks later to the day, that he and Wilmot climbed a ladder to board a trading vessel of sixty tons, commanded by Captain Nicolas Tattersall, on the beach at Shoreham, and went below to wait for the tide to float them. On the very same day, did he but know it, the Earl of Derby, one of the noblest of his supporters, who had been with him and Wilmot when they talked there in the gathering darkness, but had made north when they parted and fallen into enemy hands, was beheaded in the market place at Bolton.

The King owed his escape chiefly to the direction which he took. He had a number of men near him that evening, and no less than three thousand cavalry close by ; and some of his friends urged him to concentrate this force and escape northward. He knew better. 'I thought it was absolutely impossible,' he says, 'knowing that men who had deserted me when they were in good order would never stand to me when they have been beaten.' He was right. The

large force was easily dispersed next day by a single troop of Parliamentary horse, and it was then that Lord Derby was taken.

The King's first plan was to make for London, as we know, and his enemies doubtless reckoned that he would either take that direction or make for Scotland. They did their utmost, naturally enough, to capture him ; a reward of £1,000 was offered ; any who sheltered or aided him were proclaimed guilty of high treason ; magistrates were ordered to arrest all unknown persons in their jurisdiction ; watch was kept on river passages and at seaport towns. They had a very large force in the immediate neighbourhood. They must have thought his capture only a matter of time. But he vanished.

He went first to a remote house named Whiteladies, where he disguised himself. 'I also cut my hair very short, and flung my clothes into a privy-house, that nobody might see that anybody had been stripping themselves.'

Here too, though he does not say so, he distributed his valuables ; he gave his watch to Wilmot and his George set in diamonds to Colonel Blague. Blague later fell into enemy hands and was put in the Tower. He had hidden the George under a pile of chips and dust, but a friend conveyed it to him in the Tower, from whence he escaped to join the King in France and there re-deliver it to him.

For the next week Charles' safety depended upon the care and services of a family of small yeomen farmers and woodcutters of the immortal name of Penderel ; five brothers, brother-in-law and sister, and their old mother, each had some part in aiding him. With Richard Penderel he made his first independent move, which was an attempt after an all-night walk to cross the Severn into Wales. But this proving impracticable as the crossing was guarded, they returned, walking through the following night. At one point there was a river to be crossed in the dark and Richard must have hesitated. 'He told me it was a scurvy river, not easy to be past in all places, and that he could not swim. So I told him that the river being but a little one, I would undertake to help him over. Upon which we went . . . to the riverside and I entering the river first to see whether I could myself go over, who knew how to swim, found it was but a little above my middle ; and thereupon taking Richard Penderel by the hand, I helped him over.'

### *The King Dictates*

They eventually came not to Whiteladies but to Boscobel, a neighbouring mansion of which William Penderel was in charge. Here it was that the King encountered Colonel William Careless, one of his own officers who had escaped there after Worcester. He it was who proposed they should conceal themselves all next day in a great oak. Which they did—it was Saturday, September 6th—taking with them, as he says, 'victuals for the whole day, bread, cheese, small beer and nothing else.' And thus came the Royal Oak into our history and our language, and all those other Royal Oaks where travellers like ourselves have obtained bread, cheese and small beer.

This first and crucial week is a story of concealment at a succession of houses, Whiteladies, Madeley, Boscobel, Moseley, Bentley, all belonging to Catholic gentlemen—as the Penderels too were Catholics—all with convenient, if not comfortable, hiding places. The King moved always at night; once all five Penderels accompanied him through the darkness walking alongside his horse, with sickles in their hands. That was their last service to him.

At Bentley the next stage was decided. The owner was a Colonel Lane to whom Wilmot had gone to discuss an escape route to London; 'who told my Lord, after some consultation thereon, that he had a sister that had a fair pretence of going hard by Bristol, to a cousin of hers, and she might carry me thither as her man, and from Bristol I might find shipping to get me out of England.'

At this point a Father Huddleston appears upon the scene. An accidental meeting with John Penderel apprised him of the King's presence at Moseley, where he ministered to souls, and he hastened to add his assistance. He happened recently to have been given six new shirts, and he gave one of these to the King. Pepys was told to apply to him for details of that stage in the escape and we know from him what Charles was wearing when he came to Bentley: 'a greasy old steeplecrowned hat, with the brims turned up without lining or hatband, the sweat appearing two inches deep through it, round the band place; a green cloth jump-coat, threadbare even to the threads being worn white, with breeches of the same with long knees down to the garter; with an old sweaty leathern doublet, a pair of white flannel stockings next to his legs, which the King said were his boot stockings, their tops being cut off to prevent their being discovered

and upon them a pair of old green yarn stockings, all worn and darned at the knees, with the feet cut off; his shoes were old, all slashed for the ease of his feet and full of gravel with little rolls of paper between his toes, which he said he was advised to, to keep them from galling; an old coarse shirt of the sort which in that country go by the name of hogging shirts.' When Charles decided to attend Jane Lane as her man, 'I changed my clothes,' he says, 'into a little better habit, being a kind of gray cloth suit.' He must have been grateful; he had worn the hogging shirt and the rest for five days and nights, and his feet were cruelly weary and worn.

In due course Jane Lane and her servant (known now as William Jackson) came safely to her cousin's near Bristol. She was a Mrs. Norton, and was expecting a baby, which was why Jane had come to be with her. Let us salute this gallant lady through the mists of time, as we picture her jogging southward, pillion behind this disguised and fugitive King, through country swarming with troops watchful for him, a huge price on his head, herself in the greatest peril. The journey took three days and two nights.

There was no hope of a ship from Bristol, and it was decided to move to Colonel Windham's house at Trent near Sherborne. Here is the King's recollection of an episode soon after their arrival at the Nortons. 'The next morning I arose pretty early, having a very good stomach, and went to the buttery hatch to get my breakfast; two or three other men were in the room, and we fell to eating bread and butter, with very good ale and sack. And as I was sitting there . . . a country fellow sat just by me, who talking gave so particular an account of the battle of Worcester that I concluded he must be one of Cromwell's soldiers. But questioning him further I perceived he had been in my regiment of guards, in Major Broughton's company. I asked him what kind of a man I was—to which he answered by describing exactly both my clothes and my horse; and then looking upon me, he told me that the King was at least three fingers taller than I, upon which I made what haste I could out of the buttery, for fear he should indeed know me, as being more afraid when I knew he was one of our own soldiers than when I took him for one of the enemy's.'

The night before they were to leave there was a crisis. 'Mrs.

### *The King Dictates*

Norton,' says the King, 'who was big with child, fell into labour and miscarried of a dead child, and was very ill, so that we could not tell how in the world to find an excuse for Mrs. Lane to leave her cousin in that condition.' He thought of a solution himself; a counterfeit letter was hastily written and delivered to her at supper 'to tell her that her father was extremely ill and commanded her to come away immediately for fear she should not otherwise find him alive.' 'Mrs. Lane,' he says, played her part 'so dexterously' that everyone was convinced; they left early next day and she conveyed him safely to Trent, where she parted from him.

It was now Wednesday the 17th, exactly a fortnight after the battle, and he remained at Trent for the next two weeks, on and off. Colonel Windham soon managed to agree with a merchant at Lyme to convey the King to France, and in due course they repaired to Charmouth where the ship was to pick them up. 'And to cover the matter better,' says the King, 'I rode before a cousin of Frank Windham's, one Mrs. Judith Coningsby, still going by the name of William Jackson.' Let us salute Judith too, for her loyalty and courage. She was little more than a girl. But at Charmouth they waited in vain on two successive nights and had to abandon hope and return to Trent. We know the reason from another source; the captain's ill-concealed anxiety had aroused his wife's suspicions, and she had locked him in his room under threat of exposure if he attempted to stir.

One day while he was at Trent Charles was surprised at a sudden ringing of the church bells. The two maidservants, Eleanor and Joan, were in the secret and he sent one down to enquire the cause. 'Who returning,' he remembers with obvious amusement, 'came up and told me there was a rogue, a trooper come out of Cromwell's army, that was telling the people he had killed me, and that that was my buff coat which he had on; upon which most of the village being fanatics, they were ringing the bells and making a bonfire for joy of it.'

Meanwhile, the faithful Wilmot and others had been active on the Sussex coastlands, and one of them, Colonel Gunter, at length secured a ship, the little brig *Surprise*, at Shoreham. On Tuesday, October 14th, with Wilmot and two others, the King came down from the Downs into the little fishing village of Brighthelmstone, where they



met the master at an inn, together with the merchant who had actually done the hiring. Captain Tattersall recognised him and told Mr. Mansel, the merchant; 'but,' says he, 'be not troubled at it, for I think I do God and my country good service in preserving the King, and by the grace of God, I will venture my life and all for him and set him safely on shore, if I can, in France.' Mansel had only been told that 'a person of quality' was to be conveyed, and when he reported the captain's words, Charles, as he says 'found myself under a necessity of trusting him. But I took no kind of notice of it presently to him; but thinking it convenient not to let him go home lest he should be asking advice of his wife or anybody else, we kept him with us at the inn, and sat up all night drinking beer and taking tobacco with him.' Perhaps he knew about the Charmouth skipper after all.

After supper that night, Charles was in a room alone by the fireside, his hand on the back of a chair. The landlord came in, and after some casual seeming talk and a quick look round 'he, upon a sudden, kissed my hand that was upon the back of the chair, and said to me "God bless you, wherever you go."' There was a moment of obvious embarrassment. Then the landlord added—and one can almost hear his uncertain laugh—'I do not doubt, before I die, but to be a Lord, and my wife a lady.' 'So I laughed,' says the King, 'and went away into the next room, not desiring any further discourse with him.'

Very early next morning, he and Wilmot climbed the ladder on board; they sailed at seven, were off the French coast next morning and were put ashore at Fécamp. 'The next day,' says the King, 'we got to Rouen, to an inn, one of the best in the town, where they made difficulty to receive us, taking us by our clothes to be thieves, or persons that had been doing some very ill thing.'

And so away to Paris, friends and safety.

It will be remembered how, on the first evening, 'I talked with some, especially . . . Wilmot'; six weeks later, 'I and my Lord Wilmot got up with a ladder into her.' Lord Wilmot was eighteen years older than the King; he had won distinction as a commander in Charles I's army, was a fine and popular officer and a companionable and witty man. But he fell into disfavour in 1644 and retired to



France. He became Groom of the Bedchamber to Charles II in 1649, and remained his devoted friend and servant till his own death in 1658, for he never saw the Restoration. During the escape, apart from the two days when Charles tried the Severn with Richard Penderel, Wilmot was always at his hand, never with him by day, always joining him after dark, to talk, encourage and plan. One senses his presence and his care, and can almost feel the constant anxiety under the gay imperturbability that Charles speaks of. 'I could never get my Lord Wilmot to put on any disguise,' he told Pepys, 'he saying that he should look frightfully in it, and therefore did never put on any.' In fact, he carried a hawk on his wrist, and beyond that he would not go. Charles laughs at him, and remembers how he hated walking, on account of his bulk, and insisted on riding always. But he must have loved him too, and had thought for the perilous risks he was running; he told Pepys only what Wilmot did (and Wilmot did far more than he knew at the time), but one cannot doubt that even after all the years he was filled with gratitude for his constancy, courage and cheerfulness.

And so he ended his story. It is a wonderful feat of memory. How many of us could give a coherent, let alone a gripping, account of the events of six weeks in our lives twenty-nine years ago? If he had any notes, Pepys would surely have said so; he was meticulous in such things. Besides, not a date, nor even a day of the week, is mentioned; and intervals are approximated. It is always 'about three days,' and 'near a fortnight.' The whole feels like something spoken extempore out of a very good memory.

He had five more difficult years to live. During the extended agony of his death, Father Huddleston, who was in Whitehall, was brought into his presence. The King knew him, and was heard to say 'Once you saved my body; now you must save my soul.'

And Pepys? Four years were to elapse before he again became Secretary of the Admiralty, and we may form some estimate of the parts of this extraordinary man when we find that in 1681 he was invited, and pressed, to let his name be put forward to be Provost of King's College, and when we recall that in 1684 he was elected President of the Royal Society and as such gave its *imprimatur* to Newton's *Principia Mathematica*. Of his work as Clerk of the Acts

and Secretary of the Admiralty, there is no need to speak. Those who know have declared that the achievements of our navy in Nelson's time were in great part, perhaps only, made possible by Samuel Pepys' labours a century before. Outside his work, which ended when his old master, James II, abdicated, he was one of the best known men of his time for the range of his interests, the extent of his acquaintance and the quality and catholicity of his taste. But that is well known, and I need here do no more than quote what John Evelyn, his old friend, wrote in his diary for May 26th, 1703. 'This day died Mr. Samuel Pepys, a very worthy, industrious and curious person; none exceeding him in knowledge of the Navy. He was universally beloved, hospitable, generous, learned in many things, skilled in music, a very great cherisher of learned men of whom he had the conversation.' That indeed is an epitaph.

The story that I have here but touched on has been wonderfully told at length in books quite easily procurable. I conclude with the hope that any to whom it is new may be stimulated to read it fully, and that others may not have been displeased to have it recalled to them.

It is three hundred years since King Charles was restored to enjoy his own again—three hundred years since Pepys wrote the opening page of his inexhaustibly fascinating diary, and two hundred and eighty years since these two remarkable men together recorded what is still the most romantic story in English history.

## Sullivan

BY ETIENNE AMYOT

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ABOUT two months after I had seen Alastair Macfarlane's obituary in *The Times* I suggested to my aunt Leonie that she might care to go down to Stechley. Knowing how devoted she had always been to Macfarlane I thought she might like to see the place again while it was still intact. For I had heard the property was to be sold, and the famous collection broken up.

To my great surprise she point-blank refused. She accused me, in fact, of being thoroughly heartless to make such a proposal to her of all people. Had I no imagination? Did I not realise how the sight of that old house with all its priceless things would upset her? How the wound she had suffered at Alastair's death would open again? And how the mere glimpse of some old object such as his familiar broad-brimmed hat or cape lying about the place—lying where he himself had left it—would be more than she could endure?

I listened to these and other protestations, and felt they didn't ring quite true. I was certain she had some other reason for not wanting to go.

"Well, I'm sorry my suggestion should so deeply have offended you," I said. "I imagined you would like to see the place—if only to revive old memories."

"There are no memories to revive," she answered shortly.

Her reply surprised me. I knew Macfarlane had been ill for years and that during his long decline visitors were not encouraged at Stechley. But obviously there must have been a time when she had gone there fairly often.

"You probably know it better than most of his friends," I went on. "But this is your last opportunity to see it again."

"I can hardly see something again that I have never seen at all!" she retorted.

"Do you mean to tell me you've never been there?"

"Never. I wasn't invited."

And then I realised what was behind those earlier protestations. She still had a sense of grievance over that old omission, and resented the fact that she had never been asked.

After that I decided to keep off the subject of Stetchley. I would make no further reference to it.

But, about a week later, she returned to it of her own accord. For that morning there had been a long letter in the paper, signed by a prominent group of art-lovers, attacking the government for not buying the Stetchley collection and keeping it for the nation.

"I've been thinking over what you suggested the other day," she said. "I mean, about going down to Alastair's place. I think you are right. There may never be another opportunity of seeing all those wonderful things assembled under the same roof."

And so it was settled I should drive her down the following Friday. We would lunch at some inn on the way, then spend the whole afternoon looking at those things which her old friend had collected.

As the time drew nearer for our visit I was amused by her increasing interest. For, to tell the truth, her curiosity to see Stetchley and all it contained was every bit as great as my own—a curiosity which now she made no attempt whatsoever to hide.

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At that time—it was immediately after the war—my aunt Leonie no longer enjoyed what had once been her almost legendary reputation. The *salon* in Tite Street which she had ruled over had ceased to exist, and the house itself stood open to the sky. It had been destroyed by bombs. She was living now in a small, rather uncomfortable flat in Onslow Square, and had very few of her old possessions. She was extremely philosophic about her changed position. And once, when I asked her whether she didn't miss her treasures, she merely shrugged, and said: "Possessions? They're all very well when you can afford to keep them. But when they go—well, it's rather like the spoken word, or the lost opportunity. You realise they're beyond recall."

*Sullivan*

At the time of Macfarlane's death she was, I suppose, well over seventy. But she contrived to look much younger. She had always taken great care of her figure. And though her auburn hair was now quite white, her features were as handsome as ever.

In her day she had been one of the most successful hostesses in London, gathering round her a group of famous artists, politicians, and intellectuals. She was a lion-hunter—and made no bones about it. But people crowded to Tite Street not only because they wanted to meet the latest celebrity, but also because they wanted to see her. For she had wit as well as humour, and infinite charm.

It was in those very early days, when I was a boy, sometimes staying with her when my parents were abroad, that I first saw Alastair Macfarlane. He came to the Tite Street Sunday luncheons. Though I was not invited to join those august symposiums—when the talk was said to be as good as anything you could hear in London—I was allowed to come into the drawing-room afterwards and be presented to some of my aunt's friends. It was then that Macfarlane would take me aside and show me some object he had lately acquired. Perhaps he had just returned from one of those wanderings that took him every year to Greece and the Middle East. From his vest pocket he would extract a thin vellum envelope and take out of it some fabulous coin, in gold or silver, with the head of Alexander or Justinian engraved upon it. Or else it might be some rare intaglio, miraculously cut—or some small, exquisite Persian miniature, set with precious stones. Though I had no idea of the value of these things I recognised them for the treasures they were. And their beauty was doubly increased when he told me something of their history, and how they had come into his possession.

Alastair Macfarlane was one of my aunt's most intimate friends. Rumour had often linked their names together. I used to think how pleasant it would be if one day she married him.

He was not only one of the richest men in England, but also one of the handsomest. He was tall and extremely slim, with wonderfully elegant hands that were tapering and almost transparent. On a Sunday, when his man Sullivan dropped him at my aunt's door, I would lie in wait for him—just to see him make that superb entrance, wearing his broad-brimmed Italian hat and flowing silk cape. He

always seemed to be like some magnificent figure straight out of the Renaissance.

He was admired, and envied. Yet there were many who took him to task for the way he lived. For he was an eccentric : one of those withdrawn, unpredictable characters who, with every generation, seem to leave their imprint upon the English scene. He detested society. And, apart from those visits to my aunt, preferred to live when he was in England in the utmost seclusion.

Mortimer Mason—that other great friend of my aunt's, whom I also knew at that time—used to tell me something of what life was like down at Stetchley.

The house was one of those old Tudor places, vast and rambling, with a mass of turrets, roofs, and chimneys. It stood in a low dell surrounded by hangars of beech and elm, and was only visible when you got right up to it. It was a perfect place to bury yourself away in, and it presumably afforded its owner the sort of intense privacy he sought. Macfarlane had inherited it when still a youth at Oxford. He never made any attempt later on to modernise it. It remained exactly as it had been a century or more before. There were no baths, and no electric light. At night, old-fashioned rush lamps glowed dimly in the corridors, and there were candles in the rooms. With the wonderful things he had collected as well as inherited he always ran a terrible risk of fire, and his insurance brokers must have charged him a heavy premium. He had a large, competent staff to run the place. But the servants all lived in the village. He would have no one in the house with him at night except his man Sullivan.

The whole tempo of life at Stetchley was that of a past age. There wasn't a single modern contrivance in the place. The gardeners were still made to scythe the lawns, and the chef presided over an old iron-range that was literally pre-historic. No newspapers were ever delivered, and the radio was forbidden. Though the woods were stiff with game, no shot was allowed to be fired in them. There were several drives through the property. But, with the exception of one, the grass was allowed to grow over them.

Secure within the high stone wall which enclosed his land, Macfarlane gave his entire mind to only one thing—that superb collection which he was always adding to. But though he was so obsessed with



### Sullivan

collecting, he could never bring himself to go up to the sale-rooms and bid for the things he coveted. He sent Sullivan instead. At all the really important London sales, bidding was seldom begun until that small, gnome-like figure had been seen to take his customary place just under the auctioneers' rostrum.

The technique of the auction-room lies in a wink or a nod. And Sullivan, with the years, had perfected that technique to a fine art. So subtle, in fact, were his motions that at the end of a long morning's auction only the auctioneer himself and his clerk knew precisely what Sullivan had bid for, and acquired for Macfarlane.

The relationship that existed between master and servant was a most unusual one. Macfarlane had found the other when he was still a shepherd-boy looking after his flocks in the Joyce Country. He had brought him to England, taught him to read and write, and then, as time went on, gradually entrusted his affairs more and more to him. Sullivan managed Stetchley—not only the house, but also the large estate. He was probably the most complete general-factotum there has ever been. For he was land-agent and private secretary as well as his master's personal valet. Somehow he managed to combine these various offices with unruffled efficiency. Physically, no two human beings could possibly have been more unlike. Macfarlane was an aristocrat, magnificent to look at. Sullivan was small and rotund, bow-legged, and quite indescribably ugly.

When in the last years of his life, Macfarlane was so ill, it was Sullivan who would lift him from his bed into his invalid chair and wheel him along the galleries of Stetchley, pausing every now and then to listen to his master praise perhaps some small canvas by Samuel Palmer, or to watch those still sensitive hands lovingly handle a trinket by Cellini or Faberge. In that strange, misshapen little body there beat a heart that was as full of tenderness as any woman's. He was a few years younger than Macfarlane. And, when the other died, they had been together for close on fifty years.

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In the car that day driving down to Stetchley, my aunt Leonie suddenly said :

“Did you let anyone know we were coming?”



"I wrote to Sullivan."

"Did he reply?"

"Yes. He said how much he looked forward to seeing you again. In fact, he wrote rather touchingly about Macfarlane's affection for you. He said you were far and away his oldest and most loved friend."

My aunt glanced out of the window, then turned again to me.

"He was always the most extraordinary little man. As ugly as sin. But with a heart of gold. Alastair thought the world of him."

Then, after a pause, she added :

"It was charming of him to write like that. But you mustn't imagine the affection was only on Alastair's side. I was just as fond of him."

We drove on through the twisted Sussex lanes, and at last the Downs began to appear.

"I suppose," she went on, "I did know him better than most people. At any rate he paid me the compliment of coming to see me when he never went to see anyone else. Yet, there were times when I felt I didn't know him at all. It was like coming into a room and finding that the switch had fused, so that you couldn't turn on the light. You were perfectly familiar with the room. You'd been in it often enough before. But, in that sudden inexplicable darkness, you just stood helplessly trying to grope your way about. It was a most uncomfortable sensation."

"I was only a boy when I knew him," I said. "But even then he struck me as someone unusually shy and reserved."

"Oh, it was more than that. A lot of men are shy and reserved—particularly Englishmen of that class. But Alastair, at times, was almost pathological. The trouble was there were certain things over which he could never make up his mind. Then he'd lapse into a sort of vacuum, and remain in that state for days on end. That's why that little peasant he took out of the bog was such a boon and a blessing. For Sullivan had enough 'go' in him for a whole regiment. He could always be relied on to supply the drive and initiative which so often was lacking in his master."

She paused, and looked again out of the window.

"What used to puzzle me so much was his *innocence*. Really,

there's no other word for it. For a man of his upbringing and talents it seemed incredible he should know so little of what went on around him. I don't mean at Stetchley—I'm not competent to judge of what went on there. I mean in the actual world. The world we're all forced to live in. He joined up, for instance, in the '14-'18 War, and was wounded on the Somme. Yet when I went to see him in the hospital at Richmond, he talked of everything but the war. Not because he wished to spare my feelings, or forget the horrors he must have seen. But simply because it had all passed right over his head. He'd no idea what it was about. He knew none of the causes which had led up to it. And I doubt whether he'd even contemplated what might happen to us if we lost. That's what I mean when I say he was so innocent. He seemed quite untouched by the experience of *life*. After all, there are many people who lead solitary lives, yet discover the sort of world they live in by reading the papers. But Alastair never opened a newspaper. You'd have thought Fleet street didn't exist! The only things he read were those expensive books of art-criticism he was always buying, or those illustrated brochures which the auctioneers posted off to him. He lived for his collection. Nothing else interested him."

"Did he never think of marriage?"

She gave me a long, searching look.

"He could have married, I suppose, if ever he'd summoned up courage enough to propose to a woman. To be perfectly frank, I rather hoped he'd ask *me*. I'd been a widow for years, and I was perhaps the only woman who might have understood him. On one occasion he did stammer out a proposal of sorts. But the next time we met he shut up like a clam. Perhaps if I'd been one of those calculating harpies I might have forced him to the point. But I doubt it. Like most men who vacillate and are never sure of their own mind, he could also be extremely obstinate."

"I shouldn't have thought he was that," I said.

"Then why," she demanded, "did he choose to live as he did? He was enormously rich. He was wonderfully good-looking. He loved beautiful things."

"Perhaps he *only* loved beautiful things."

"No," she went on. "It was nothing but mule-like obstinacy

that made him withdraw from others, and live like a hermit. It wasn't in the least *necessary*."

"Well, I imagine he was perfectly content to live the way he did."

"I wonder. If you have a complex, and give way to it, you only encourage other complexes. In the end he was really too eccentric."

She paused again.

"I suppose I sound like a disappointed woman. One of those predatory females who've missed the 'bus. And you must think all I'm saying is just a mass of contradiction. For I tell you I probably knew him better than most people. Then admit there were times when I didn't know him at all. I say he only lived for those things he collected. Then go on to abuse him for being so single-minded. The truth is—as you've no doubt guessed—I was passionately in love with him. I used to flatter myself he'd come one day to Tite Street and throw himself at my feet. Which proves, doesn't it, how susceptible we all are to wishful thinking! Even now I can remember how my heart would miss a beat when he walked into the house. Sometimes he'd arrive before anyone else. And I would foolishly imagine he'd deliberately come early in order to pour his soul out to me."

"It does seem odd," I said, "that you weren't able to bring him to the point. He must have been your only failure. For part of your own legend is that you could always twist any man round your little finger."

"Well, I wasn't able to twist *him*."

She remained silent for a while, then went on again.

"One winter I *did* try to force his hand. Helen Wantage had lent me her house in Rome. It was one of those lovely old villas near the Forum. I'd been there some years before with Helen, and simply loved it. It was the most romantic place you can imagine. I looked forward enormously to having it this time all to myself. In that vague way of his, Alastair had mentioned he might be going again to Athens and Constantinople that winter. And so I suggested he should break his journey in Rome, and spend a few days with me. He said there was nothing he'd like more. I arrived in Italy that winter as strung-up and as excited as a young girl. I'd gone and

bought myself a whole new wardrobe in Paris. I was certain this time he'd propose to me. I got to the villa about two weeks before he was due to arrive, and spent most of that time arranging and rearranging the rooms I was going to give him—trying to make them exactly as I thought he'd like them to be. I worked at those rooms in a perfect fever of anticipation. Then, on the day he was supposed to come, I got an abrupt little note saying he'd decided to go straight on to Athens. Months later, when we met again in London, he didn't make the slightest reference to that visit which he'd cancelled at the last moment. I expect it had gone right out of his head! All he could talk of then was some old torso he'd picked up on the Piræus, and for which Sullivan had managed to beat down some unfortunate Greek dealer."

"But why," I asked, "did he never ask you to Stetchley?"

"I suppose he regarded Stetchley as those Trappist monks regard their cells—as a refuge from the rest of the world. Perhaps, in that odd escapism, he found what seemed to be security. Who knows? And then, of course, he was surrounded down there by all those wonderful things. Sometimes I suspect they took the place of his friends—in the sense that they were more *real* to him. He could gaze at them, touch them, catalogue them, write about them, and feel an ease and assurance with them that he was simply incapable of revealing to ordinary creatures of flesh and blood."

"He must really have been a queer fish."

"If you think that, then I've given you a false impression of him. He had great fascination. And there was no-one else like him. It was only that in his extremely complex make-up there was some unaccountable little kink."

She suddenly sighed.

"Perhaps it's as well he never asked me to marry him. It mightn't have been a success."

\* \* \* \* \*

After lunch we took the little lane that forked off the main road to Stetchley, and drew up at the Tudor gate-house. I got out of the car and rang the bell. An old woman came running out, bobbed a curtsy, and unlocked the gates.

"Are you the lady and gent Mr. Sullivan's expecting?" she asked, speaking with a broad country accent.

I said we were, and we drove on for about a mile until we came to the house.

It was a fine example, I suppose, of the late Tudor period. It was built of those small rose-coloured bricks. And the south front had an undeniable grandeur. But I had never been to a place which seemed more silent or shut up. It looked as though no-one had lived in it for years. The windows were all closed, and there wasn't a breath of smoke coming out of the chimneys. On one side of the ornate porch the creepers had grown so high that they sent out long trailing tendrils which waved against the leaded panes. Also those hangars of beech and elm were far too near the house. They shut out the light, and seemed to brood in the most oppressive way over the vast, sprawling old place.

"An ideal retreat," murmured my aunt sardonically, "where you suspect only man is vile. Or perhaps I've got the quotation all wrong. And here it is only *woman* who is vile!"

But her curiosity to see it was stronger than any resentment she might still feel, and she was out of the car before me. She stood there, her mouth pursed up, her eyes fixed on the place.

I went and tugged at the bell. You could hear it echoing through the house. Then at last we heard the sound of footsteps, and bolts being drawn, and the door swung open on its creaking hinges. As it did so, we both involuntarily moved forward. Then all further motion was suddenly arrested, and we could only stand and blink at the extraordinary apparition which waited there in that open space to greet us.

There are some moments in life when you are so amazed by what you see, that, for a while, all power of speech is denied you. If you are decently bred you try not to convey by the expression on your face what you might be feeling. If you haven't that gift to dissemble you simply stand and stare. On this occasion I suspect my aunt Leonie fitted into the former category, and I into the latter. For nothing was more calculated to shock, to throw one off one's balance, than the vision of that small, rotund figure got up in his late master's hat and cape. The hat was so huge that it came well down over his

forehead, half concealing his ears. And the cape, at least a foot too long, was bunched at the hip and held together by a gnarled little hand in a vice-like grip. There he stood—macabre, fantastic, and quite unbelievable, clothed in the inheritance which he deemed to be his by right. And, as if to accentuate that claim, he stuck out a bandy little leg, and made a flourishing gesture. No doubt it was meant to be one of the warmest welcome. But the effect was stupefying. Then he suddenly burst into speech. And, hearing those leisurely spoken accents, you detected another parody of Macfarlane.

"My dear Madame Leonie," he said. "This is the very greatest pleasure—to welcome you to Stetchley."

Perhaps, years ago, Macfarlane may once have addressed my aunt in that fashion. But certainly no-one else had ever dreamt of doing so. She kept her composure, however, looked perfectly calmly at him, and gave a frigid little nod.

"Good afternoon, Sullivan. I hope we haven't put you to any inconvenience keeping you in like this. We merely want to walk about, and see the things in the house."

"You will find everything exactly as it was in Mr. Macfarlane's day!"

"That's why we've come. To see it before it's all broken up."

"There's no question of its being broken up," he said, leading us into the great old hall.

"Well, that's what we read in the papers," she said.

"Oh, the papers!" he exclaimed. "*They've* never been notable for telling the truth, have they!"

He steadied himself for a moment against the refectory table. Macfarlane's cape must have weighed him down.

"It was for that reason we never had a paper in the place. We knew you couldn't open one except to read what wasn't true."

That intrusive 'we' brought a slight frown to my aunt's brow.

"Mr. Macfarlane buried himself away down here," she said. "It was his own choice, of course. But I'm not sure he was right to do so."

"I mustn't contradict a lady," he replied. "Particularly one to whom Mr. Macfarlane was so deeply devoted. But I think he was wise to stay here. When you see what he collected I'm sure you'll



agree that he had everything to compensate him for remaining at Stetchley."

"Well, we won't argue about it," said my aunt, taking off her gloves and stole and putting them on a chair.

"I have prepared a little light refreshment in the west library," he went on. "You might perhaps care to partake of something before we tour the house?"

"Thank you, Sullivan. It's very kind of you. But we have only just finished luncheon. And it's a long drive back to London. I think we'll stroll round now, and see what there is to see."

Her voice had taken on a colder tone. You felt she was making it as plain as she could that she hadn't come all this way merely to sit at tea with the servant of her old friend.

"Shall we begin then with the long gallery?" he said. "All the early bronzes are there. Also the Flemish tapestries."

As we walked up the stairs my aunt suddenly reverted to the subject she had mentioned a moment before.

"You say the collection is not now to be broken up?"

"Not now."

"Why? Has someone bought it?"

"It has been inherited."

Then, after a pause, he added:

"When Mr. Macfarlane died, no will was found. And so, naturally, the trustees of the estate assumed everything would pass into the possession of a distant cousin who now resides in Scotland. This gentleman—Mr. Angus Macfarlane—was informed of this fact. And his first reaction was to come down here, tell me he disliked the place and thought nothing of the things in it, and intended to put the property as well as the entire collection up for sale. Mr. Angus Macfarlane is one of those sporting gentlemen whose main preoccupations are to fish and hunt and shoot. He has never interested himself in the arts. With justice, I believe, you might call him a philistine. He realised, of course, some things were to go to the Tate. They were mostly those pictures of the English School which Mr. Alastair Macfarlane had originally inherited with the property. He never cared for them. He had written to the Tate many years ago saying, at his death, he wished them to go to that gallery. So Mr. Angus



Sullivan

Macfarlane couldn't put *those* things up for auction—for they were not his to dispose of. But, until a few days ago, he certainly believed as indeed did everyone else—that the rest of things here *were* his."

"And are they not?" interrupted my aunt.

"No, Madame Leonie. They are not."

"Then to whom do they belong?"

"Mr Macfarlane chose to leave them to *me*."

I must confess that my aunt who, until then, had managed very very well with Sullivan, keeping him at that distance she thought proper for a domestic servant, did now lose something of her composure.

"You mean to tell me that *you* have inherited all these things?"

"It was only on Wednesday," he went on, "two days ago, to be precise, that some papers were found in a safe deposit. I cannot think why they weren't found before. It would certainly have saved much confusion. Amongst these papers was a Will, legally signed and witnessed. In that Will my dear friend stated that such monies as he possessed, as well as real estate, were to come to me. He also stipulated that all the things we had collected together should also be mine. In short, he appointed me to be his sole heir. So that is why, dear Madame Leonie, when you ask me whether the collection is to be broken up I tell you that no such thing will happen. It is my intention to keep Stetchley with everything in it exactly as it is."

"But what about the death duties?" exclaimed my aunt. "They are certain to be enormous!"

"Yes," he said. "They will be very heavy. But I believe I can raise enough for that purpose by disposing of the properties in Norfolk and Scotland. Also by cutting down some of the timber. You have seen for yourself that there is a great deal of timber here. Far too much, in fact. It is time some of it was thinned out."

"Well, Sullivan," said my aunt. "This is really a most extraordinary thing. And I suppose I have to congratulate you."

\* \* \* \* \*

For the next two hours we wandered about the house. But I doubt whether my aunt gave as much of her mind to the things we were made to look at as perhaps she might have done. You felt she

could hardly bring herself to believe what she had just been told. And then, to be preceded at every step by that grotesque little figure still wearing his late master's hat and cape must obviously have exasperated her. He seemed, however, sublimely unaware of her feelings, and continued to inflict his parody of Macfarlane upon her.

The place was like a museum. It was crammed full of the very finest things. There were whole galleries of early Greek, Persian, and Byzantine art, and rooms full of pictures, coins, miniatures, porcelain, as well as the most beautiful furniture. He told us the history of everything that caught our eye. And listening to him, I was reminded again of those days when I was a boy, when Macfarlane had taken a coin or some other precious thing out of his vest pocket and spoken to me of it in my aunt's drawing-room in Tite Street. The Servant had been an apt pupil of the master. His memory was as carefully catalogued as presumably were those shelves and cabinets which lined so many of the rooms.

Sometimes he would throw out some personal note of his own. Stopping before an exquisitely inlaid table on which were several pieces of fine porcelain, he said :

"Now that was a *real* find. The porcelain is from St. Petersburg—one of the earliest examples. We discovered it just as you see it—table and all—in a house in Damascus. It was probably the property of some exile from Russia."

Then, turning round, and pointing to a collection of icons on the opposite wall, he added :

"They were in the same house. We bought them at the same time."

"You must have enjoyed," said my aunt, "travelling about with Mr. Macfarlane."

"It was a great education," he answered gravely. "But I believe I was useful to him."

"I'm sure you were," said my aunt. And, in that short reply, she seemed to hint his usefulness had also served another purpose—one which, at a later date, was to bring him into a vast inheritance.

But as the afternoon wore on I could see she was finding it more and more difficult to keep herself under control. It was that constant linking together of Macfarlane's name with his own in literally every

sentence that must so have got on her nerves. You felt, too, now we had seen most of the place, that he was determined to put himself upon an equal footing with her. Thus he would suddenly exclaim: "You and I, Madame Leonie, would have agreed with him over that issue!" Or, again: "Those bureaucrats in Constantinople didn't understand what he was after. But you and I would have known exactly what he had in mind!" At any moment I expected to hear her make some devastating reply, to sever herself once and for all from that intimate association he was thrusting upon her—making her, as it were, a third party to his relationship with Macfarlane. But she remained perfectly silent and let him rattle on, merely giving from time to time that same frigid little nod, as though she wasn't really taking in what he was telling her.

By the time we came to the last room she very plainly showed what a strain her visit had been. She looked pale and worn out. Having lost her own possessions, it was only to be expected she would take less interest now in the possessions of others. And, after all, curiosity alone had brought her to Stetchley. But now that curiosity was sated. She had taken in enough. And she simply couldn't take in any more.

When we came down the main stairs again, she hurriedly whispered to me:

"For heaven's sake let us go now! I cannot endure one more moment of it!"

But Sullivan didn't regard our visit as ended. For he had opened another door, at the far end of the hall, and was standing expectantly beside it. He had at last taken off that preposterous hat and cape, but only in order to give his impersonation another turn. Now he was dressed in a sombre tweed suit, cut to that exact same Edwardian pattern which Macfarlane had always worn, and over his protruding stomach there hung, in two loops, in the manner affected by his late master, a massive gold watch-chain.

"There is just one last thing I want to show you," he said.

But my aunt had picked up her stole and gloves. In the most determined way she was walking towards the front door.

"No, Sullivan," she said. "We have seen enough. It's all been very interesting. Very interesting, indeed."

She fumbled for a moment with her bag, and I wondered whether she was going to take a note out of it and offer him a tip.

"But you cannot go from Stetchley without seeing the greatest treasure of all!"

Something in his tone of voice—something of appeal, and at the same time triumph—made her hesitate, and turn round.

"Very well," she said. "But we cannot stay long. For we have to drive back to London."

\* \* \* \* \*

The room he led us into had probably once been the gun-room. It was extremely small. The only furniture there was in it was a table covered with green baize and a chair. It had two doors. For behind the one which opened out into the hall there was another—of thick steel. I noticed also a sliding steel shutter which fitted over the small, closely-barred window. Let into the wall was an immense steel safe. No room could have been made more burglar proof. It was the sort of room you would expect to find in the vaults of a bank.

He drew forward the chair, and motioned my aunt into it. Then, turning the combination dials of the safe, he took a set of keys out of his pocket, and inserted one in the lock. The safe door swung open, and he peered inside. He brought out a small velvet-covered box, and handed it to my aunt.

"Look at that," he said.

She glanced curiously up to him, for his manner had suddenly undergone an extraordinary change. He seemed to be shivering with some sort of suppressed excitement.

"Why, what is it?" she asked.

"Pray do as I ask, dear Madame Leonie," he answered impatiently. "Open it."

She did so—and we both gasped. For the diamond which threw its dazzling light into that half-darkened room was the most astonishing jewel. It was of immense size, and remarkable purity. It had been set into a ring.

My aunt took it out of its case, and held it up before her. She seemed hypnotised by it.

In that same manner of quivering excitement, he said :

"Do you know what that is?"

She gazed at it a long time before answering. Then she said :

"It's the most beautiful thing I ever saw."

"I *knew* you'd be the one to appreciate it!" he cried.

"Why," she went on. "It must be the finest diamond in the world."

"One of them, dear Madame Leonie. *One* of them. There's no doubt of *that*!"

Then, impulsively, he took it from her, and slipped it on to her finger.

"It looks better *there*, don't you think?"

He stood back to admire it. With a little shock I saw he had put it on the third finger of her left hand.

She held it up, and the jewel flashed and gleamed, like a flame of blue and white fire.

"Where did he get it?" she asked. "Where on earth did he find it?"

"That stone is the van Rijn diamond," he said.

"The van Rijn diamond," she repeated. "You mean, the one there was all that fuss about? The one that was said to have disappeared?"

"It was only the Press that stirred up all that commotion!" he answered contemptuously. "Those in the know were perfectly aware what had happened to it. It had come here—to Stetchley."

She glanced up suddenly.

"So *he* bought it."

"Well, in a manner of speaking. For actually I was the one to go and get hold of it. You know how he was always sending me up to those auction-rooms in London. He used to say I had a way of bidding for something, and getting it without anyone being any the wiser."

"But," she asked, "did that stone ever come up for sale?"

"No. I had it withdrawn. That's why some people thought it had disappeared."

"He wanted to have it, did he?"

"He was *determined* to have it. He didn't mind what he paid for it. He simply gave me *carte blanche* to get it. And so I got it for

him. But only on condition that those from whom I bought it should treat the whole thing with the utmost secrecy."

He was talking now entirely to her. I think he had forgotten I was also in the room.

"When did you get it for him?"

"Ah, it is strange you should ask me that."

He was breathing very fast, and gazing intently at her.

"But that's a woman's intuition, I suppose. And he always said you had wonderful intuition."

He paused, then went on again.

"Do you remember that time you'd asked him to break his journey? To break it in Rome, where you'd taken a villa?"

"Yes," she said slowly. "I think I do remember something of the kind, now that you mention it. But it was so long ago. And my memory these days isn't what it used to be."

"Well, I've an idea that Mr. Macfarlane had something in mind when he was so determined to buy that ring."

"Oh," she answered vaguely. "I see what you mean. You mean he'd collected other jewels, and wanted to crown them with this one."

"No, Madame Leonie. I don't mean that at all. I mean what he wished was to give it to someone."

"Well," she said, in the same vague way. "It would certainly have been a handsome gift. And I don't suppose anyone would have the courage to refuse it."

"That is precisely what I myself should have thought," he answered.

I was now certain he'd forgotten all about me being there, a witness to what he was saying.

"But you know what he was like," he went on. "How he could never make up his mind about something. How, in the end, so often, he couldn't go *through* with a thing."

She made no reply to this statement—one with which she would so thoroughly have agreed. She merely glanced again curiously up at him.

"It was meant for *you*, dear Madame Leonie. It was meant to go on that hand—where it is now. And where, dear lady, I mean it to stay!"

And then, like a stone, he dropped at her feet.

Sullivan

"Tell me you'll accept it!" he cried. "Tell me you'll accept it!"  
With great dignity my aunt rose from her chair.

"Really, Sullivan. This is very strange behaviour. Do get up, and act in a proper way."

But though she was exhorting him to behave himself, her eyes were still riveted upon the ring gleaming on her hand.

"Dear lady, we have known each other so long," he went on, not moving from that kneeling attitude. "You and I were the only two who ever understood him. Though he's left everything to me, he would want you to share it too. I'm as convinced of that as I'm convinced of my own mind."

"You mean," she said, "you're giving me this precious thing—this wonderful jewel?"

"Yes—yes. I want you to have it. And, with it, my heart, and all that is here. *All* he has left me."

She gave a little frown, and moved back a step.

"Well, it's very good of you, Sullivan. Very good of you, indeed. We've already agreed, haven't we, that anyone who was offered so magnificent a gift simply couldn't have the courage to refuse it."

He rose to his feet, and threw out his arms.

"Then you will take it? You *will* accept it?"

"Willingly, dear Sullivan. If that is what you think your master intended."

The word, so cruelly recalling his old position, was like the lash of a whip. She couldn't have wounded him more had she thrust a sword into him. He turned away, looked down, and seemed to shrink in stature. Whilst she stood there, calmly looking at him, having gained at last what she had failed to do all afternoon—forcing him to acknowledge the chasm which divided them.

"But it is from *me*," he almost whimpered. "It is *I* who am making you this offer."

She gathered her stole about her, and started to walk towards the door.

"I should prefer," she said, "to think of it as coming from your master. From my dear old friend, Mr. Alastair Macfarlane."

\* \* \* \* \*



In the car driving back to London, I said :

"You do realise, don't you, that he was making you a solemn proposal of marriage?"

She threw back her head, and laughed. She laughed as though no-one had ever said a funnier thing to her.

"What an absurd idea!" she said.

"It isn't in the least absurd," I went on. "He was merely doing what for years you'd hoped Macfarlane would do—fall down on his knees, and pour out his soul to you."

She turned to me, with the same expression of extreme amusement.

"You should write books. Long romantic novels. You're wonderfully imaginative."

"Imaginative be damned!" I answered coarsely. "He was parting with his most precious possession because he thought he was going to get something else in exchange for it!"

"But you *heard* him," she protested. "How he went on all afternoon about Alastair and me and himself—as though we were some sort of inescapable trinity. Can't you understand he is only doing what he *knew* Alastair always wanted to do?"

I scowled at her.

"If you keep that thing it'll be thoroughly immoral."

"I fail to see anything immoral in it. You have a very strange way of putting things. Is it immoral to pay attention to the wishes of the dead?"

"Certainly," I said. "If you're merely going to twist them to suit the purpose of the living!"

After that we drove on in silence. But I could see her gaze was still riveted on that great, gleaming jewel on her hand.

Then I said :

"So you're going to go on wearing that thing?"

"No," she answered. "I think I shall sell it."

"And what will you do with the money?" I enquired sarcastically.

"Use it to erect some suitable memorial to the memory of Alastair Macfarlane?"

"Why not?" she said. "Why not, indeed? What could be more fitting—more appropriate?"

*Sullivan*

She turned once more to me, and I saw a new expression in her eyes—as though some sudden inspiration had flashed into her mind.

"I walked down Tite Street the other day," she went on. "The house still stands open to the sky. It is just as it was after the bombs had fallen on it. Alastair loved that house. He used to say, after Stetchley, it was the only place he felt at home in. So why should I not buy it, and do it up again? Would anything testify *more* to my deep affection for my dear old friend?"

I stopped before the big new block of flats in Onslow Square, and she looked resentfully up at the gaunt, concrete façade.

"You've no idea," she said, "how I've hated living in that sordid little flat!"

## *A Wish*

BY PETER GREEN

---

Come, my bright ball of memory, let me toss you  
On to the toppling summit of this year's  
Illusions, among the careless loves and heartaches,  
The energy and futility of seasons,  
The surface beauty and the internal wound.

Break in your iridescence upon the aching  
London streets where the drills stutter and jam,  
Where under the stones thunder the blind trains,  
Where the print dances and blurs on the mad news-sheets,  
And the god of the audit-books receives his worship.

*Do ut des*: here spring comes in with fashions,  
Dappling the streets with silk and synthetic dyes:  
Summer's a sweating emptiness, and autumn  
Renews with golf and gin the flaccid arteries:  
Only Christmas persists, the changeless winter rite,

Which even the Church failed to transmute: look, still  
Fulfilling some racial well-spring of desire  
The garlands, the communal feast, the ritual birth persist;  
The meaning half-hidden—for some, as always, excuse  
For a licensed orgy—but still, still what it always was.

Oh, if among the blossoms in the side-roads  
Bounding over the swirl of the pavement leaves  
Would spring the rhythmic daemon of the year  
To charm us out of our perverse routine,  
And strike a life-stream from the metal cities!

## The Hayloft

BY RICHARD LUCAS

---

FROM the hayloft she could see down into the yard and beyond the lane and the orchards to the hills which marked the frontier. The trees in the orchards were leafless and black and she wondered if they had died of old age or been burned in the fighting.

Beyond them, to the right, the lane went along the foothills to join the road to the city. She had not been down the lane since she was a girl but she remembered that somewhere it crossed a small river and then a railway line. Each spring the river overflowed, but in a rather delicate way, so that the surrounding fields were splashed with small glassy puddles. But now in the heat of summer the river had dried to a stream running over harsh grey stones.

Often that summer she heard convoys of tanks and lorries and battalions of men moving towards the city, and occasionally there would be a distant rumble of gunfire and nearer at hand the spattering of machine-guns as the columns of professional soldiers defended themselves against the attacks of revolutionist students.

The girl, her name was Lita Rankova, always thought of her compatriots as students. She was a student herself but because of her sex was not allowed to fight with the local group. Instead she lay in the loft of a barn all day and watched for an enemy more dangerous than the professional soldier—the spies.

She was a tall girl, dark-haired and dark-eyed. Large lips swollen with the dry heat of the summer complemented the fullness of her breasts, hidden beneath the baggy overalls she wore. Her face was tanned a curious light yellow.

She lay on her stomach in the loft on a pile of golden straw. At her side was an automatic rifle. She had not used the rifle that summer; in fact not since the uprising started in the early spring. She had learned to shoot at college. It had taken a long time to get

used to the crashing roar of the gun exploding in her ears and the butt kicking against her shoulder. Her aim had been bad, until after a few weeks one of the men had found a box of tin helmets, and with one of these perched rakishly on her head she was surprised to find that the sound of the bullet detonating was reduced.

This immediately increased her confidence and she began to shoot more carefully—first of all over twenty-five yards, then fifty and then over a hundred yards. The longer the range the greater the challenge. Her accuracy increased until she had become near perfect on every length of range. Over the months the shooting had developed from just one more scholastic subject to a means of killing the enemy. Mock bayonet charges had strengthened this feeling until she found herself longing for the revolution.

During the spring the college had finally closed as political differences came to a head. It was obvious that a revolution was at hand; the group organised and armed themselves accordingly. Their leader was a tall, heavily-built man called Hector. With black hair cut short like the arched back of a cat, eyes wide-set and magnified behind thick glasses, he gave the appearance of being a bully. But he was not. Strongwilled and full of determination he knew what was right for his country. The enemy, knowing that there was to be trouble, began to move in over-night, and a few days before the member groups revolted in the city Hector had detailed jobs to his own people. On a large-scale map pinned to a wall in one of the college rooms, he had shown the women where they were to place themselves during daylight hours to watch for infiltrating spies. They must spend every day watching the hills that formed the frontier. At night, when the guards were doubled on the frontier, they could return to their own homes to eat and rest.

The loft in which Lita lay was part of a barn; behind it stood an empty farmhouse. It had once been used for storing grain. Sacks had been taken in through the doorway in the side of the roof. A trapdoor and a ladder led down into the barn below. It was dusty and hot but she took no notice.

To her right beyond the main road she knew that another girl was watching from a deserted cottage. A mile away to the left someone else sat in the top of a windmill, gazing through the spiked glass of a

### *The Hayloft*

broken window. They were all around. The watch was unceasing but so far fruitless and as enemy reinforcements continued to flood into the country down the main arterial roads, any hope of catching spies faded.

One heat-lazy afternoon Lita was disturbed by a new sound. It crescendoed out of the sky towards her and became a sudden roar as a light aeroplane flew over the farmhouse. For a brief moment Lita saw the pilot as the aircraft banked away over the orchards. Then sunlight flashed on the cockpit, blinding her eyes.

She continued to watch as the plane turned down the lane towards the main road. Soon it had disappeared and she sat listening to the engine fading into the distance. A few seconds later there was the staccato rap of a machine-gun. Another gun snorted once in answer and then there was silence.

She listened for the sound of the plane. Her ears and mind waited tensely for some indication of what had happened.

She saw the plane before she heard it. It was floating across the fields and over the orchards, belching flames and smoke from its fuselage. Then it hung in the air crackling, as if looking for somewhere to fall.

Finally it turned on its side and slipped slowly into one of the fields. As one wing fell away from the body, Lita began to run from the loft.

A few minutes later she was standing alone in the field staring at the wreckage as flames licked away its markings and colours. The petrol tank burst in a hideous roar and black smoke clouded the summer sky. After a long time the flames died away leaving only a charred and twisted skeleton. Lita turned then and walked slowly back across the field towards the farm. She wished that she could have done something. The pilot must have been killed instantly.

As she walked she became conscious of someone watching her from the road. She did not turn to look but she knew that it was a man.

She walked slowly back to the loft, collected the gun and carrying it carefully before her, went down into the yard again and crept along the fence towards the orchard. Once in the orchard she moved quickly and carefully, running from tree to tree with her heart thundering against her ribs. But the orchard was empty.

She did not know if she was relieved or disappointed. After days of waiting her first spy had slipped past her. She returned to the yard and sat in the shade of the barn and watched the orchard until the sun had set.

Occasionally the wreckage of the plane crackled ominously as it cooled, but she neither heard nor saw a soul.

The following day she cycled from her home to the farm as usual in the misty light of early morning. She steered the bicycle with one hand and held the gun in the other. Every night at home she cleaned the gun and kept it loaded by her bed. In the morning when she reached the barn she hid the bicycle and then cleaned the gun again for something to do. After that she lay in the straw and watched the sunrise over the hills. For some people it was to be a day of fighting or loving, dying or living. But for Lita, it was just another day of watching.

At noon she went downstairs and round to the back of the barn, where there was an old water-pump, rusty and overgrown with weeds. From it she filled two buckets and carried them back into the barn where she emptied the water into a marble feeding trough. Then she slipped out of her overalls and took off her underclothes. For some time she stood with just her hands in the water, feeling relaxed and happier, then she washed her arms and legs and finally splashed the cool water over her body, holding cupped handfuls of it against her breasts.

When she had finished washing she rolled up her clothes and climbed into the loft, and lay naked in the warm straw.

After an hour or so she dressed, ate her sandwiches and kept watch again across the fields and orchards.

Daylight began to fade and the sun had dropped away behind the hills, leaving the sky a mass of crumpled yellow silk, when she heard the footsteps in the yard.

Inquisitively, without even reaching for the gun, she thrust her head out of the loft door and looked down. A young man was walking casually from the direction of the lane towards the open doors of the barn, his feet sounding dully on the hard dry earth. He walked arrogantly and purposefully. Lita watched him for a few seconds and then reached back for the gun. As quietly as she could



### The Hayloft

she clicked off the safety catch and moved away from the loft door. She sat with her back against the end wall and put the gun to her shoulder, the muzzle, unwavering, pointing at the trapdoor. When she heard his feet on the bottom rung of the ladder leading to the loft, she took first pressure on the trigger. Slowly she lowered the gun so that the moment his head appeared she would have him covered.

When the trapdoor did open, it was his eyes that filled the sights of the gun. He paused to look at her down the barrel then he grinned and pulled himself up on the straw in front of her. He did not speak but instead his eyes seemed to mock at her. He was ignoring the gun but she kept it pointed at him.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"You," he answered bluntly.

"Who are you?"

"A friend," he smiled.

"How do I know that?" she asked.

He paused for a moment, then he said, "Do you know Hector?"

"Of course." She continued to point the gun at him.

"Isn't that enough?" he cried.

"I suppose so," she murmured and reluctantly lowered the gun, feeling suddenly very defenceless under those mocking eyes.

He moved closer to her.

"What's your name?" he asked abruptly.

"Rankova. Lita Rankova."

"I have heard of you," he said and smiled. He glanced at the gun. "Are you looking for spies?" It sounded like a game.

"Yes," said Lita firmly. Then: "What *have* you come here for?"

"To rest."

He lay back in the straw beside her.

"Who are you?" she asked quietly.

"Rankova. Johnson Rankova."

The gun slipped from her hand.

"We have the same name."

"Yes. But I do not think we are related."

Suddenly Lita burst with curiosity. Where did he come from?

*Richard Lucas*

How was the fighting going? He listened carefully, choosing to answer only a few from the tirade of questions.

It was dark before they realised it and when she finally left the barn she had to walk home, pushing the bicycle across the empty fields.

He stood in the yard and watched her leave. She stopped at the gate and called, "Will you come tomorrow?"

"Sometime," he answered quietly. The darkness swallowed her up.

The following morning a messenger visited Lita's house. He had come from group headquarters in the city with photographs of known spies. He was a tall fair-haired boy with a small grey cap perched on the back of his head, the bottoms of his trousers pushed into thick grey socks. Lita thought that he should have been wearing clogs and standing knee-deep in red tulips. He stayed long enough to tell her that things had worsened in the last few days. The college had been burned down during the night and Hector was dead. He had been trapped in the basement with several other students. They were burned alive. The fighting was continuing and a great deal of damage was still being inflicted on the enemy. Hundreds had been killed and wounded in the past few weeks.

Lita left the boy at her home. He looked tired and slightly forlorn and was happy to rest for a while over a cup of strong tea. The morning air had a heaviness Lita had never known before, and the sky was empty of birds. She cycled on towards the barn, sweat beginning to moisten her body, the photographs in her overall pocket. She had not looked at them yet.

When she reached the barn she hid the bicycle under some old flour sacks and then climbed up into the loft. Johnson was still there, lying asleep on the straw. She walked over to him and put down the sandwiches and the small bottle of milk she had brought with her.

Suddenly he opened his eyes and stared up at her. She smiled nervously at him and when he put his arms round her shoulders and pulled her down into the straw beside him, she tried to break away. But then she went limp with exhaustion and lay still, feeling his body and mouth pressed against her own, the photographs flattened across

## *The Hayloft*

her breast. The drowsiness of her body enticed Johnson to kiss her mouth and cheeks and hair and ears, his hands held tightly just below her breasts so that soon Lita felt her body trembling and her mouth moist with the movement of his lips.

By midday the loft was bursting with heat. They lay apart from one another in the stifling straw, eyes closed and palms sweating in each others hands. Lita was asleep, breathing very quietly. Johnson lay watching a spider cleaning up a dusty cobweb in the rafter over his head. After an hour or more it returned to its nest to resume the endless task of watching and waiting for another victim.

Johnson got up then and went down into the yard and round to the water-pump, stripping off his shirt as he walked. The sun beat down on his bare head and shoulders filling him with a warm strength. He washed his face and chest and then flung his shirt over one shoulder and walked out into the lane which ran through the cherry orchards towards the main road.

When Lita awoke the hottest time of the day had passed. She lay with her eyes closed, conscious of the heavy heat in the loft and the hardness of the straw against her skin. When she finally opened her eyes she was just in time to see a fly run into the spider's web. She watched, fascinated, as the spider set about tying up his latest victim. In a few seconds the fly was dead.

Lita stood up and stretched. She was not surprised that Johnson had left. He had told her that he had a meeting to attend. He would be back.

She went downstairs and filled the marble trough with water from the pump. When she had washed and dressed again she decided to sit in the yard to eat her lunch. It was still very hot and she felt the sun burning her face and arms. After a while she remembered the photographs in her pocket. She took them out. There were five of them. Four photographs and a pen sketch.

The sketch was of a girl and the photos were of men. She looked at them. The first two were old men, handsome still but unsophisticated. The third face was vaguely familiar but she did not recognise it immediately. The fourth was a tall, dark-haired boy with glasses. She looked again at the third man. The photograph was so bad that she had to think carefully before she recognised the

face, distorting the features in her mind's eye until suddenly she saw that it was Johnson. The other name was not, however, Rankova.

That had been a clever idea. Her mind went blank. Tears pricked her eyes so that his face began to dance in her trembling hand. What could she do? If he came back, it would be her duty to . . . Perhaps he would not come back. Suddenly she despised him for his trickery. She pushed the photographs back into her pocket and climbed up into the loft to clean the gun.

She did not go home that night, but sat with the gun in the crook of her arm, waiting for him. The moon rose steadily into the sky above the barn and then faded away to become a small round cloud as dawn lit the slightly misty earth.

By midday Johnson had not returned. Lita had no food and only water to drink. Her stomach was beginning to ache, her throat sore and her lips rough with the movement of her dry tongue.

She planned to shoot him the moment he appeared in the yard. She had fixed the sights carefully, knowing that she would be able to fire only one shot.

As the afternoon passed, tension mounted in her body. She wanted to kill him now; not because he was a spy and an enemy but because of the way he had deceived her. She ached for him to appear so that she could take her revenge. At the same time the desire to be with him again was increasing.

When she saw the man in the orchard her heart squeezed the air out of her lungs. Her brain clamped shut like a vice. She watched as he walked through the orchard and climbed the fence into the yard. It was Johnson.

Lita lay flat in the loft, just the tip of the gun protruding through the door. As he walked from the fence she followed him in the square of the sights, which moved nervously from his head to his heart and back to his head. He did not look up.

Carefully Lita took first pressure on the trigger; the sights, shaking now, were on his heart. Beads of sweat stood out on her face.

He was soon halfway across the yard but she let him come on, at every step his figure grew larger. She could kill him now but she did not pull the trigger. The sights moved with him. Then

### *The Hayloft*

suddenly he passed out of sight beneath her and she heard him walk into the barn below.

In despair she fired the gun. The bullet ripped into the dusty yard and ricocheted off towards the orchard. The crash of the explosion sang in her ears so that she did not hear herself crying. Her body shook with the released effort and through her tears she saw the cherry trees in the orchard dancing like black skeletons.

BY X. J. KENNEDY

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## *The Autumn in Norfolk Shipyard*

is a secret one infers  
from camouflage. Scrap steel  
betrays no colour of season,  
corrosion works year-round.  
But in sandblasted stubble  
lurks change : parched thistle burr,  
blown milkweed hulls—dried potholes  
when a tide reassumes its foam.

Destroyers mast to mast,  
mechanical conifers,  
bear pointed lights ; moored tankers  
redden slow as leaves.  
Under the power crane  
dropped girders lie, dead twigs ;  
in drydock ripened tugs  
burst pod-wide—ringbolts bobble  
to quiet upon steel-plate  
mud. A flake of paint falls,

green seas spill last year's needles.

NORFOLK, VIRGINIA, U.S.A. 1960

## *The Child in the Water*

BY BERYL SEATON

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THIS park had once been the grounds of a royal palace. But the crown and the court had moved away, and the small houses and the narrow streets, the ill-kept yards, the badly-converted shops, had crept round it like fetters. It was still beautiful in its heart but bedraggled, the edges sadly frayed. Remembering that trees keep their shape and their fashion of growth, whatever the changing style of the surroundings, and that landscape is one of the more enduring furnishings of our world, it was not too difficult to people this place with citizens of another age, kings and queens, lords and ladies: ladies—women who, dragging themselves around in their fine stiff clothes, suffered and bled like the rest of us, who loved and cringed away from love as we do, who bore children and lost them, either to the world or to the grave, almost from the moment that they left the womb.

Walking through the park on this day, lost in my thoughts, there was little enough of the present to bring me back. It was about half past nine, too early for housewives or children to be about, unless they were taking time off from chores or school. As I started to cross the asphalt surrounding the concreted boating pool (which had once been a lily pond), I did notice one woman standing curiously motionless under the trees, shrunken into her cheap coat that had lately been smart, her shoes tawdry, her hair in curlers under a grubby head-scarf. Over on the other side of the pond there was a tractor with a large grass-cutting machine in tow. Its driver was taking a rest, leaning across his seat and talking to a park policeman. It was in the act of withdrawing my eyes from the two men, bringing my glance back across the pool, that I saw the child.

He was in the water, lying on the bottom of the pond, a little boy about two. His legs were wide apart, his arms at his side, the palms



Beryl Seaton

of his hands turned upwards. The golden curls on his head and his small fat knees seemed to move ever so slightly, but it was not the boy who moved, only the surface of the pond, ruffled by a faint morning wind.

I don't know why I didn't plunge in then and bring him out. Of course I should have done. Afterwards I told myself that if only he'd shown the faintest sign of life . . .

I was running round the side of the pond towards the two men. I must have given a cry, or shouted something, for they were both staring, startled, in my direction. As I approached them I managed to call out a babble of words: "Quick, come quickly . . . a child in the pond . . . fallen in . . . lying on the bottom. Oh, quick!" They were starting towards me now, and we all raced round to the spot where I had been when I saw him. It was difficult to find the exact place. The small breeze had strengthened, ruffling the surface of the water, making it dirty with leaves and dust. I could no longer see the bottom, nor any trace of the child, but the policeman plunged in, and the tractor man followed him, the water up to their thighs, wading to and fro across the pool in obedience to my pointing, like gun dogs quartering the ground. Every step they took brought up a cloud of brown silt.

The trees round the pond were tall and old; they cast a darkness across one corner, and the water was bronzed with rotting leaves. At the other end was a little landing stage with a lot of boats tethered to it, red and yellow and green, which by and by the children would come and hire. After a time the policeman hauled himself out by the staging and came across to me, leaving a thick, muddy trail behind him.

"Can't find anything. A small boy, you said. What age?"

It seemed important that I should reply as accurately as possible. "About two," I said, after only the briefest pause.

"Well, we can't find anything. You're *sure* you saw him?"

"Oh, yes!" It was more of a cry than an answer and it appeared to convince him, for he said, "We'll have to get an appliance," and turned and squelched his way down to the telephone box at the corner.

I don't know how many minutes drifted away before the fire engine

### *The Child in the Water*

arrived, but as soon as I heard its bell my knees liquefied and I had to sit on the grass. They didn't waste much time getting the hoses rigged and in a matter, as it seemed to me, of seconds, the poor little pond was being pumped away into the sewers. By now I would almost have welcomed a delay but there was a sort of sick fascination in watching the slimy green concrete walls reveal themselves.

Few people thought it worth their while to stop and watch; the policeman, the tractor man, the firemen and I, all shared a wish to keep our thoughts private, and so the ghoulish whisper, thank heaven, never got round. But one woman did come and sit by me and start to talk. It was the woman I had seen first of all, the woman in the cheap copy of a Paris coat, who had stood so strangely motionless under the trees.

"I hope this grass isn't damp after the rain," she said. "It won't do you no good if it is."

I prayed silently that she would go away.

"I seen him too," she said. "I saw him first a good hour before you did. I was waiting for someone to come along."

That made me turn at her, my eyes rounded with the horror of it. "Good heavens!" I cried. "Why ever didn't you get him out?" And then could have bitten my tongue for what she might reply.

But she didn't upbraid me. "Lying there as if he was asleep," she went on softly, "his little knees sort of bending."

"But why . . ." I couldn't help the insistence, "why didn't you raise the alarm?"

"It wouldn't have done no good," she said.

The pond was almost drained by now. All the things that one does see in emptied ponds began to reveal themselves. A solitary boot: one rusty bicycle wheel: a long, dead branch festooned with weed: bricks, bottles, rusted tins, a sodden newspaper or two, a bright piece of orange peel. The policeman came and stood in front of me; I tried to keep my eyes on his face, away from his dripping clothes. "There's nothing there," he told me.

"You see what I mean," said the woman.

Later on during the day, they called at my home. They questioned me keenly but with an underlying kindness, and I did my best to answer.

"This boy. Can you give us a description? What was he wearing?"

"Blue jeans. A tee-shirt—red and white stripes." It all went down in the notebooks.

"Anything on his feet?"

"Yes. Red shoes . . . sandals. Short white socks."

"Anything else? Jacket? A hat?" I shook my head. "Fair hair, you said. What colour were his eyes?" My own suddenly filled with tears. "I'm afraid I didn't . . . I couldn't . . ."

The sergeant turned to his constable. "Probably closed," he said, and the questioning moved to my husband. "Your wife's a sensible woman?" he enquired politely. "Ever caused anything in the nature of a public mischief?" After a few shocked denials, we got rid of them. They had the last kindly word on the doorstep. "If we have a child reported to us as missing, who answers to this description, we'll let you know." But no child was so reported, either then or afterwards.

Any old, walked-over landscape is a battlefield of women. Men have their skirmishes; a sudden foray here, a clash of armour there: a ghastly, gripping struggle, a corpse or a hundred corpses left on the ground, and the day's work is over. The blood gushes from men killed in war, and then it's finished. There are a number of tumuli in this very park, the quiet green resting places of slain warriors. But the blood of women goes on dripping all the time from the living body into the greedy ground. In the afternoons I used to see the mothers of small children sitting wearily on the grass, all but dozing, yet never quite able to give up the watch. In the mornings I almost had the park to myself. Almost, but not quite.

When you live near a place of beauty, you are drawn to it, whatever the consequences. The tall trees, the age-old satisfaction in the contours of the land, the serenity of the grassy slopes, all these did their best to soothe me. They might have succeeded (for I never went near the pool) if it had not been for the fact that wherever I walked I came across that woman. If I went in the flower garden she was there, sitting on a distant bench. If I turned along an avenue of trees she appeared at the far end, walking urgently towards me. When I plunged at a tangent into a shrubbery she emerged from the bushes

### *The Child in the Water*

and fell into step at my side. Eventually I realised that the bond between us was too close-knit to be unravelled, and submitted myself unhappily to her conversation.

She was married, with one child. "Like 'im," she said, nodding across the park to the boating pool, "but not so old." She was a complete product of our time. She worked in a factory up the line, making, so far as I could sort it out, some kind of plastic for use in place of china. "It's so like," she kept on saying, "you wouldn't know it wasn't." Her mother had been a housemaid and she had never got over the stigma. Bad as it might be to keep a servant, it was far, far worse to be one. "I think that was why I could never take to me flat," she said, touchingly confident that I would understand. Her husband? "Oh, we're not speaking." What about the child, I asked her? Who looked after him? "He went to the nursery until they closed it. Now, one of me neighbours takes all the children of the mothers who go out. Course she has to have a licence. And she knows how to charge. One way and another, it costs me nearly all me wages to work." She laughed gaily and I knew better than to ask, then why do it? Some mothers work for economic, some for spiritual reasons; either way, there is no scope for argument.

I used to meet her at all hours of the day. Once, when I asked her about it, she said, "Well you see, it's the shifts. This month I don't have to go in till five." Wouldn't it be fun, then, I suggested, to look after the little boy in the day time? "Oh no. Wear me out, he would, under me feet all day. Besides, Mrs. Carter's *paid*. She knows children, knows their ways." She laid great stress on the fitness of people, by virtue of payment, to do the job. One day, when we saw one of the park policemen upbraid some children for running in front of traffic, she was indignant. "Fancy! Letting 'em run about wild like that. When he's paid to be in charge here. That fellow ought to lose his job!"

Nevertheless, she loved the boy. She was like a deprived person, continually weaving conversational patterns that would bring the object of the deprivation into the talk. "There's a lovely head of hair," she would say, as some girl went by. "Course, a child's hair's better. You should see my boy's. Got a lovely set of curls, he has."

She admired my shoes and said, "I got some for my boy. Red. Ever so lovely. I like to see their little feet in a bit of colour." Once, when I hadn't seen her for nearly a week, she emerged wearily from behind a summerhouse. "I bin working extra shifts. My boy wanted jeans, like all the other kids, so I fixed it up with the foreman. We got 'em yesterday. He looks lovely!" She wrung her hands in an unconscious expression of grief, and I saw how white and well-kept they were. There was something about them of the fleshy vices; that period when you've had your fun and are starting in on the long payment.

She looked exhausted, as I think we all do at the end of a London summer . . . the heavy, airless days and the stuffy nights. The living green had gone out of the park, the trees were choked with dust and the grass was sooty and wadded with toffee papers. I said urgently, "Why not give it up? That boy of yours won't be a baby much longer." She interrupted me with a touch of tired pride. "He isn't now. Shot up like anything. A reg'lar little man, he is, in his jeans."

It was I, now, who suddenly wanted to engage her in conversation; I wanted, somehow, to force her into the mould as I saw it. I said, "Go home, while you've got him. Go and play with him, mother him, feed him up. You love the child, you'll do it well." But for all my persuasions, the words were the wrong ones. I tried again—the beauty of motherhood, the brief span of a child's childishness, the glory and the gaiety of bringing up your son. But I couldn't seem to get out of her head this idea that only the paid are capable. And when I had tried everything I could think of, she looked at me with eyes that had lost their friendliness. "You," she said, "you talk just like the welfare."

She didn't appear to be in the park after that. The seats in the flower garden remained untenanted, the long winding paths were empty. I was always expecting to see her skimpy figure advancing on me from round a corner or over a hill, and when she didn't come, I took to dodging up and down the contours of the place, trying to catch her, thinking she must be there, avoiding me. I sat behind trees, hid in shelters, telling myself that sooner or later she was bound to pass. Once I gave up several hours to quartering the park, hurrying

### *The Child in the Water*

backwards and forwards across the curves of landscape until I felt flustered and faint. But I really knew before that day that I was wasting my time, that she wouldn't be there. I seemed to feel that I had been given a personal, urgent mission to get her out of that factory, and I had failed.

And then, one morning about a fortnight later, we suddenly came face to face. I saw at once that she had discarded the tawdry factory clothes and wore simple, shabby things which were infinitely more becoming; she looked altogether serener, more rounded. "I done it!" she exclaimed. "I give in me notice! I just stayed one more week to get him one of them red and white striped tee-shirts."

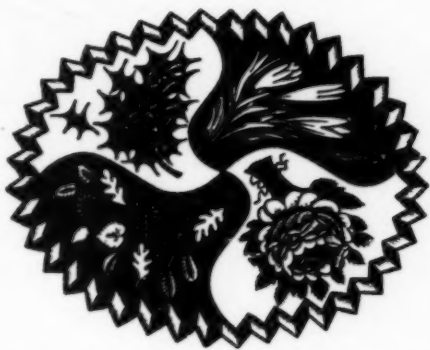
A small early breeze was blowing down the slopes; it caught me round the shoulders and made me shiver. Without either of us realising it, our footsteps led us down towards the boating pool—the first time for nearly six months. "And I've made it up with my chap. We're going together again. We might even give him a little playmate." She giggled like a bride. "So late this morning. I've just been chasing round after the milkman. I missed him early. Nourishing food like you said. It's *all* like you said." She laughed happily.

I turned and looked into her animated face. "The boy," I said. "What have you done with the boy?"

"I left him playing on the doorstep. I hope he didn't try to come after me . . ." The words faded in her throat. It was as if all the blood had suddenly drained out of her into the waiting earth. We had come through the last group of trees by now and only the bare asphalt lay between us and the pool. All was as one might have expected . . . the policeman and the tractor driver wading across, desperately marking off the ground. In the distance but rapidly coming nearer, clear on the morning air, we could hear the clanging of the fire engine's bell.



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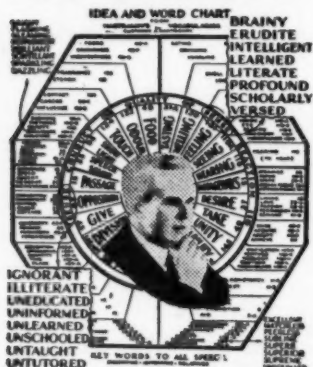
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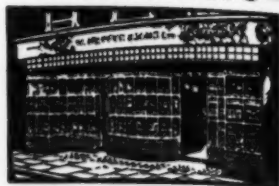


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